

- **Walden and the American Landscape**

AMST 1700 • Fall 2018- TuTh 12:30–1:45pm

Koons Hall [KNS] 202

Instructors

Robert Thorson, Professor of Geology.

E-mail: robert.thorson@uconn.edu. Office Hours: TuTh 9-11, Wed 11-12, or by appointment, Beach Hall 237; phone 860-486-1396. *Professor Thorson will lead Woodchuck discussion section meetings in Koons Hall 202.*

Christopher Clark, Professor of History.

E-mail: c.clark@uconn.edu. Office hours: Weds, 2.15-4.15pm or by appointment, Wood Hall 121; phone 860-486-1965. *Professor Clark will lead Loon discussion section meetings in McHugh Hall [MCHU] 111.*

Course description

Sustainability. Social media. Globalization. Immigration. Environment. Alienation. Race. Literature. Anxiety. War. Climate change. Making America great again. These are the salient political issues of today.

Your understanding of these issues will benefit from a close reading of the prophetic *Walden; or Life in the Woods* by Henry David Thoreau. Since its publication in 1854, our nation's most scrutinized work of literary nonfiction has become a historic touchstone for how to live the good life, individually as a person, and collectively within a group of friends, family, and communities. As Katharine Wittmore summarized in 2014,

Every age gets the Thoreau it deserves. This crank genius has been alternately held up as our greatest nature writer, the icon of American individualism, the firebrand dissenter, the sage of simplicity, the transcendental mystic, or the in-your-face libertarian. These personae slow-fade and recur like the seasons. Meanwhile everyone from the civil rights movement to the Tea Party movement claims him. He's been called the first hippie. Edward O. Wilson dubbed him "the father of environmentalism." He's a beacon for rebellious teens. St. Francis meets Holden Caulfield meets Stokely Carmichael. This protean quality can steamroll you. I typed in "Walden" on Amazon.com, for instance, and got more than 28,000 results. Still, America's arguably most canonical book, wrote John Updike, "risks being as revered and unread as the Bible."

Our course offers you an expertly guided, and discussion-based "close reading" of this famous, challenging, and rewarding work. We begin by examining the relevance of *Walden's* to your modern lives. After helping you understand your own "sense of place," from September 6 to October 30 we will examine Thoreau's physical, historical, and aesthetic "sense of place" at Walden Pond that gave rise to his masterpiece *Walden*. Geology will inform our understanding of the development of the Walden terrain and ecosystem. Social and economic history will explain the land use history that developed on that terrain. Philosophical and aesthetic history will help explain why this book remains valuable today.

With that preparation behind us, we read the book over five class periods from November 1-15. A large majority of past students report that this guided reading profoundly influenced their life outlook. Some felt like they deserved a trophy. Following this read, from November 27 to December 4 we will examine *Walden's* enduring legacies, one of which is Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge* (1992), which we will read over Thanksgiving Break. Though her work stands in great contrast to Thoreau's, both explore common themes of nature and environment, family and community, ethics and politics. The course will end with your personal takeaway in class on December 6, in writing on December 9, and individually with your section leader during the final exam block.

Course objectives

The course takes an integrative approach to subjects that are often taught in separate branches of the curriculum. Combining geology, history, literature and art, it demonstrates how the perspectives of different fields can come together to illuminate a single subject. It also calls on us to consider the mid-nineteenth century origins and legacies of American environmentalism and to reflect on our personal philosophies and sense of place.

Among the course's immediate aims are the following:

- To provide a personal, interdisciplinary, enriching course that satisfies the Humanities general education requirement at UConn, and the Honors Core requirement in its Honors Program;
- To create a shared intellectual community for Honors faculty and students; and
- To help you understand yourself and the present era in which we live.

FORMAT

Class meetings will be of four kinds, according to the schedule detailed below.

(1) Whole-group meetings (designated “G” on the schedule) will take place in Koons Hall 202, with all students and instructors present.

(2) When we meet in discussion sections (designated “S” on the schedule), students will go to the section (either Loon or Woodchuck) they are assigned at our first class meeting.

(3) We have also arranged five field trips (“F” on the schedule), one off-campus and four on campus. The off-campus field trip to Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, is scheduled for Sunday, September 23 (rain or shine). To compensate for the day trip to Concord, there will be no class on Thursday, September 20. The first two on-campus site visits, to the Torrey Herbarium and the Dodd Center, will show you some of the 19th century materials held at UConn, tell us about Thoreau, his contemporaries, and his legacies. The third visit, to the Benton Museum of Art, will feature the aesthetic world of Thoreau and his contemporaries. The final field trip is to Tift Pond at the edge of campus, which will serve as a surrogate for Walden Pond as you prepare your final papers and journal entries.

(4) The final encounter will be an individual meeting between you and your section professor (Loon or Woodchuck) during the final exam period.

Attendance at all these class meetings is required. Students are responsible for completing all reading, writing, or other preparatory assignments before each class or field trip.

We will use HuskyCT throughout the course to minimize paper handouts and to make materials easily accessible. The control panel on the left contains these menu links:

- **Syllabus** – An online version of the syllabus divided into the background material, and the daily schedule.
- **Announcements** – These will be sent intermittently, as needed. Always check the evening before class.
- **Schedule** – A color version of the printed schedule for handy reference.
- **Journal** – Instructions and examples.

- **Field Trips** – Handouts to be read before each field trip.
- **Readings** – A complete list arranged alphabetically. The assignments by the day are listed in the syllabus.
- **Lectures** – PowerPoints used during class are posted here.
- **Writing Assignments** – Instructions are posted here.
- **Odds & Ends** – various items posted ad hoc.

The AT-A-GLANCE schedule provides an easy way to keep track of what will be happening. Reading from left to right, start with the date (Tues, Thurs, Sun). To the right is a color-coded tab indicating whether we will meet in group (G), in section (S) as a Woodchuck or Loon, at one of five trip localities (F), not at all (N), or as an individual (I). Next is a content outline. The column to the right indicates whether there will be a paper due (at 8:00 AM by email), a journal entry to be written, submission of your journal on Tuesday for a Thursday return (a journal check), or submission of your portfolio in hard copy. Details of each day are on the syllabus or in the handouts.

Readings

There are three required books for the course. Available for purchase at the UConn Bookstore (Textbook Department) are:

1. Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*, edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
2. Williams, Terry Tempest. *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. New York: Vintage, 1992. Paper.

Issued in class will be:

3. Thorson, Robert M. *The Guide to Walden Pond*. Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018. Paper.

We'll also be reading various articles and selections from books. Unless stated otherwise these will be accessible online through the course HuskyCT site. From the

HuskyCT site main page, select “Readings.” Readings are listed by author and title as in the syllabus. Those not on HuskyCT will be accessible directly via weblinks in the syllabus.

GENERAL RESOURCES

The Thoreau Society, founded in 1941, is the oldest and largest organization devoted to an American author and is dedicated to promoting Thoreau’s life and works through education, outreach, and advocacy:

<http://www.thoreausociety.org/>.

The Thoreau Reader includes many full text selections:

<http://thoreau.eserver.org/>.

The Thoreau Institute, located in the Walden Woods, is another prominent institution devoted to the study of Thoreau and the environment. They are official collaborators for *The Guide to Walden Pond*. It has also digitized many of Thoreau’s writings:

<http://www.walden.org/>.

The University of Virginia hosts an American Studies website with a wealth of resources:

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/>.

Writing Assignments and Grades

There are no exams or quizzes. Each student is required to submit five increasingly challenging papers on scheduled due dates. Each paper must be turned in to your section leader via e-mail by 8 a.m. on the due date, and you must be prepared to discuss it in a section meeting that day. You will also be expected to keep a journal (as Thoreau did; we’ll give you guidance about this). At the end of the course you will gather all these materials into a portfolio for final submission, accompanied by a summary. Handouts with more detailed instructions for each assignment will be provided on the HuskyCT tab.

Your section instructor will evaluate and grade all assignments, except for Paper #2, which will be graded

by Professor Thorson, and Paper #3, which will be graded by Professor Clark.

Paper #1. Sense of Place: This one-page “mini-memoir” will be about a place that was important to you when you were forming your core identity, perhaps from childhood. (This was the case with Thoreau’s childhood visit(s) to Walden Pond.) Write a 500-word essay describing concretely your sense of place or your lack thereof. DUE 9/4.

Paper #2. Scientific Description: This short paper asks you to select features of Walden as you experience the site on the field trip and to compare (or contrast) your perceptions with what Thoreau presented. You must write in a technical style based on the separate instructions that we will provide to you. You can choose to illustrate or document your essay with photographs taken on the site. DUE 9/25.

Paper #3. Historical Essay: This paper provides an opportunity for you to take some aspect of Walden and weave it into the scientific, social, and intellectual context of Thoreau’s world. This assignment will give you practice writing as historians do. DUE 10/11.

Paper #4. Aesthetic Essay: This paper requires that you select some aspect of Walden Pond (or of the book *Walden*) and address it from a literary/aesthetic perspective. For example, you might focus on descriptions and verbal patterns that make *Walden* a literary classic. DUE 10/30.

Paper #5. Synthesis Paper: Your assignment is to address the question: “Why read *Walden* today?” In an essay of 2,000 words (maximum), reflect on Thoreau’s text; draw pertinent examples and quotations from a variety of sources covered by this course (lectures, field trips, assigned readings, different chapters of *Walden*). Relate the book to the contexts you consider most significant (for example, social, environmental, or philosophical). Alternatively, if you think students should not trouble to read *Walden*, then feel free to write a comparable essay on the opposite point of view: “Why bother to read *Walden* today?” Write for a national audience of your contemporaries, meaning students in college. DUE 12/9.

Journal: We expect you to keep a journal. We’ll provide you guidance as to the kinds of material you might enter in it and the purposes a journal can serve, but the form and content of your journal will be up to you. You must

make journal entries on at least six occasions during the course:

- A 8.30 Initial thoughts
- B 9.27 Natural environment with observations and sketches of Walden Pond and the materials seen at the Torrey Herbarium.
- C 10.9 Social context, with observations made at the Dodd Center.
- D 10.25 Aesthetic context, with observations made at the Benton Museum.
- E 11.15 Your personal thoughts after finishing *Walden*, compared with others'.
- F 12.6 Final Thoughts, following our last session.

We encourage you to make further entries, and as many as will be useful to you as you reflect on the course, your experience in it, or the themes that it leads you to think about. For some, the discipline of making daily entries helps. We will hold ungraded journal “checks” on Oct. 2 and Oct. 30, so please bring your journals on those Tuesdays to hand to your section instructor. They will be returned on Thursdays so you will have them over the weekend.

Portfolio: You will be asked to gather together all your writings and other documents (e.g. photographs) produced in the course, and to write a final reflection on the whole package, i.e. what you have learned (or not) from the engagement with Thoreau and the American landscape and by taking an Honors core course. DUE during the Final Exam period scheduled for the course (to be announced).

Instructors do not give grades. Students earn them. To receive a course grade you must submit all required work. The final grade will reflect your assignment grades, class preparedness, and your success at engaging with course material and your peers in such a way to facilitate learning for all. It will be scaled as follows:

- Paper #1 – Sense of Place, 0 points
- Paper #2 – Scientific, 10 points
- Paper #3 – Historical, 10 points
- Paper #4 – Aesthetic, 10 points
- Paper #5 – Synthesis, 20 points
- Journal, 20 points

- Portfolio (your reflections), 10 points
- Preparedness and class participation, 20 points

The preparedness/participation grade will be subjective, and based on a review of the entire course. You must come to class prepared to contribute, whether inspired to do so on your own or called upon by the instructor. We will know who is up to speed and who is not, and who attends and who does not.

Finally, much of the challenge in this course takes place neither in group, nor section meetings; it will be between you the individual and the reading/writing assignments for the day. There are no reading assignments on days when a paper is due.

Each section leader will assign grades to their students.

A Warning About Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct that violates the University of Connecticut's Student Code will be penalized. According to its seriousness, the penalty can range from an F for an individual piece of work to an F for the course.

Do not attempt in your written work to claim anyone else's work or words as your own. Unattributed copying, cutting-and-pasting, or paraphrasing from a published source, a website, or another student is plagiarism and regarded as a serious offense.

Taking care when making notes and giving citations in your papers for phrases or passages quoted from elsewhere will help you avoid plagiarism. On the course HuskyCT site Homepage is a "Plagiarism module" developed by the

UConn Institute of Teaching and Learning that gives essential guidance. Follow this, and refer back to it; we will assume you are familiar with it.

If you have any questions at all about how you should proceed, do not hesitate to ask an instructor.



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Syllabus - DAILY ASSIGNMENTS



Bust of Henry David Thoreau by Walton Ricketson (1898). Courtesy of Concord Free Public Library.

Syllabus & Schedule of Readings

Note: Readings in file are underlined, and located alphabetically under the authors last name.

Syllabus & Schedule of Readings

Note: Readings in HuskyCT are underlined, and located alphabetically under the author's last name.

Part I - A Sense of Place: Walden as Symbolic Landscape

- G 8.28 Introductory meeting: Looking at Landscape (be prepared to introduce yourself).
- G 8.30 Discussion: Excerpts from *Walden*
- Journal #A
- Billy Baker "At Yale, you can take a course on being happy," *Boston Globe*, April 26, 2018.
- Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). At this stage, read only the *Walden* passages indicated in the reading file under Thoreau, Henry D – Readings from "Fully Annotated" for first Day.
- Robert M. Thorson, *The Guide to Walden Pond*. (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 7-15, 150-153. (You have a copy as a handout.)
- Robert Pogue Harrison, "The True American," *New York Review of Books*, August 17, 2017.
- Katharine Whittemore, "Diving into Thoreau's *Walden*," *Boston Globe*, May 25, 2014.
- S 9.4 Discussion: Your Sense of Place
- Paper #1: Sense of Place (see instructions under Assignments). You must submit your paper to your section leader via e-mail by 8 a.m.

Part II - The Physical Landscape: Geology and Natural Science

- G 9.6 New England

Robert M. Thorson, “Geology,” *The Encyclopedia of New England Culture*, ed. Burt Feintuch and David H. Watters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 567–69.

Thorson, *Guide*, 51-59, 62-71, 159-161, 171-176.

G 9.11 Lake Walden

Thorson, *Guide*, 98-103, 153-155 (limnology); 105-109, 182-187 (hydrology); 110-115 (ecology); 195-198 (seasons).

J. Curt Stager, et. al., “Climate variability and cultural eutrophication at Walden Pond (Massachusetts, USA) during the last 1800 years,” *PLoS ONE* 13, no. 4 (April 2018).

Dianne Timblin, “Thoreau as Naturalist: A Conversation with Four Authors,” *American Scientist* 105 (2017): 248-251.

F 9.13 Field Trip: Torrey Herbarium, Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (see handout)

S 9.18 Discussion

N 9.20 No class. Field trip on 9/23 instead.

F 9.23 Field Trip: Thoreau Country, Concord, Mass. (see handout)

Thorson, *Guide*

Thoreau, *Walden*, 78-88; 168-177.

S 9.25 Discussion

- Journal #B
- Paper #2: Scientific (see handout). You must submit your paper to both Professors Clark and Thorson via e-mail by 8 a.m.

Part III - The Historical Landscape

- G 9.27 Transitions on the Land
Thoreau, "The Bean Field," *Walden*, 150–61.
William Cronon, "A World of Fields and Fences,"
in *Changes in the Land* (1983; new edition, New York:
Hill & Wang, 2003), 127-158
Robert A. Gross, "Culture and Cultivation:
Agriculture and Society in Thoreau's Concord,"
Journal of American History 69 (June, 1982), 42–61.
Thorson, *Guide*, 137-143.

- F 10.2 Field Trip: Dodd Research Center: Archives and
Special Collections (see handout)

Edwin Way Teale, "Introduction" to Henry D.
Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (New York:
Dodd, Mead, 1946, 1955); you'll see a copy of this
edition of *Walden* at the Dodd Center

- * "Journal check"
G 10.4 Religion and Philosophy

Philip F. Gura, "Religious Combustion," *American
Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Macmillan,
2008), 98-122.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836), available in
an 1849 edition at Google Books, or at
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/29433> .

- S 10.9 Discussion
• Journal #C

- S 10.11 Discussion
• Paper #3: Historical (see handout). You must
submit your paper to both Professors Clark
and Thorson via e-mail by 8 a.m.

Part IV - The Aesthetic Landscape

- G 10.16 Romanticizing Nature
Thomas Cole, “Essay on American Scenery,”
American Monthly Magazine 7 (Jan. 1836), 1-12.
Alan Wallach, “Thomas Cole’s ‘River in the
Catskills’ as Antipastoral,” *Art Bulletin* 84 (June
2002): 334-50.
- F 10.18 Field Trip: William Benton Museum of Art (see
handout)
- G 10.23 Transcendentalism, Utopia, and Conservation
Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Man the Reformer: A
Lecture read before the Mechanics’ Apprentices’
Library Association, Boston, January 25, 1841,” in
Emerson, *Nature; Addresses, and Lectures* (Boston,
1849).
George P. Marsh, *Address delivered before the
Agricultural Society of Rutland County, September 30,
1847* (Rutland, Vt., 1848); read a facsimile or a
transcript at the Library of Congress American
Memory website:
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/cnchron1.html> .
- S 10.25 Discussion
• Journal #D
- S 10.30 Discussion
• Paper #4: Aesthetic (see handout). You must
submit your paper to your section leader via e-mail
by 8 a.m.
* “Journal check”

Part V - Reading *Walden*

- S 11.1 Through “Economy,” Thoreau, *Walden*, 1–77.
- S 11.6 Through “Visitors,” Thoreau, *Walden*, 78–149.
- S 11.8 Through “Baker Farm,” Thoreau, *Walden*, 150-201.
- G 11.13 Through “Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors,”
Thoreau, *Walden*, 202–261.
- S 11.15 Through “Conclusion,” Thoreau, *Walden*, 262-325.

- Journal #E

Thanksgiving Recess

Part VI - Legacies of *Walden*

- S 11.27 Compare and Contrast
Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (New York: Vintage, 1992).
- F 11.29 Field Trip: Tift Pond (see handout)
- G 12.4 Debating Thoreau
Kathryn Schulz, "Pond Scum: Henry David Thoreau's Moral Myopia," *The New Yorker* (Oct. 19, 2015), 40-45
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/19/pond-scum>
Donovan Hohn, "Everybody Hates Henry," *The New Republic* (Oct. 21, 2015),
<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/123162/everybody-hates-henry-david-thoreau>

Thorson *Guide*, 203-210.
Josh Macht, "Can Tech Save the Humanities?"
Boston Globe, April 8, 2018.
- G 12.6 Your Take-Away
- Journal #F
- 12.9 • Paper #5: Synthesis (see handout). You must submit your paper to your section leader via e-mail by 11.59 p.m. on Sunday, December 9
- Finals Week * Portfolio due at time and date of "final exam" for this course, to be announced