



Environmental Storytelling: Religion, Race, and Nature

First-Year
Experience

FYSU 134 &
FYSS 101

REI-US Course

Spring 2024

This First-Year Experience course will deepen students understanding of the ways in which religion and race are intertwined with climate change through the lens of storytelling, with a focus on Indigenous, Black, and feminist voices. Students will be challenged to engage in big questions about meaning, values, and responsibilities in addressing pressing social and environmental issues. We will read stories from

around the world, consider the art of storytelling, and write our own stories. The humanities offer an opportunity to reshape how we think about environmental problems and what counts as "the environment" itself. Students will be introduced to the realities of the climate crisis and the ways in which environmental sustainability relates to justice, politics, ethics, and religion.

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Required Texts

Diane Wilson, *The Seed Keeper: A Novel*, (2021): https://www.amazon.com/Seed-Keeper-Novel-Diane-Wilson/dp/1571311378/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1700584994&sr=1-1

Octavia Butler, Damian Duffy, & John Jennings, *Parable of the Sower: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, (2021): <https://www.amazon.com/Parable-Sower-Graphic-Novel-Adaptation/dp/141975405X>

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Campus Resources: By the completion of the First Year Experience, a student will be able to identify and use the appropriate academic resources and student support services at College of Charleston. These include the Addleston library, information technology, the Center for Student Learning, the Career Center, and other appropriate academic resources, student support services, and cultural resources.
2. Gain information literacy: use appropriate tools and search strategies to identify particular types of information specific to the disciplines; evaluate the relevance, quality and appropriateness of different sources of information; recognize and classify information within a bibliographic citation; access and use information ethically and legally.

3. Integrative Learning: Faculty will use writing, speech or media in innovative ways to achieve integrative learning by students. By the completion on the first year, a student will be able to: use appropriate critical thinking skills and problem-solving techniques in appropriate disciplinary contexts and make connections across disciplines and/or relevant experiences.

My Responsibilities	Your Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construct a quality course in which assignments and assessments serve to broaden knowledge and develop reading, writing, and thinking skills Cultivate a classroom environment where students are supported when sharing experiences and questions Facilitate honest and respectful conversations around challenging topics Grade objectively, consistently, and in a timely manner Respond to student questions and concerns swiftly, answering emails within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours over the weekend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete assignments and assessments to the best of your ability, making use of the resources provided and those offered by CofC Actively pursue your own learning and the learning of others through attentive listening, sharing of knowledge or questions with the class, and full participation in classroom activities A willingness to engage difficult topics with respect and openness If/when challenges arise, email me as soon as possible so I understand what is going on

Community Standards: Working in small groups, write at least three community standards you believe we should uphold this semester. This can be about participation, timeliness, respect of particular views, etc. Use the below space to add in our community standards.

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#Participation in class (200 points)

In-class task. Active student participation is crucial for the success of this course and the development of your individual learning. We learn best when we learn together. Throughout this course, we'll spend considerable time laying a foundation conducive to respectful but challenging discussion through which we can all grow. We will grapple with complicated, emotional, and thought-provoking topics as a community. In this endeavor, we will seek to be supportive of each other and to actively reflect on our own assumptions. Attendance is mandatory, as is participation in class discussions and work performed in groups. In discussion, aim for substantial contributions over quantity of comments. That is, comments should respond to those made by others—listen to each other, move the discussion forward, and pose new questions for consideration. You must complete at least 60% (18 of 28) of classes and weekly assignments in order to pass the course. No absences or missing assignments will be excused, although make-up work will be allowed for health or religious absences.

FYSU-134

Dr. Brennan Keegan

Best contact: keeganbl@cofc.edu

Office: 202 at 4 Glebe Street

Office hours: Wednesdays 2-4pm & by appointment

Course Assignments

Participation in Class, Seminars & Exercises	200 pts.
FYSS101 Grade	100 pts.
8 Forum posts	200 pts.
Two Response Papers	200 pts.
Final Project	300 pts.

I trust you to tell me directly any time you are going to miss class due to health issues and in turn, I will trust that the explanation you give for your absence is honest and truthful. If you miss class, make up activities will be assigned. If you are sick for a prolonged period of time, we will work together to determine a plan of action that will benefit your learning. The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths that have various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. We value student rights and

freedoms, including the right of each student to adhere to individual systems of religion. The College prohibits discrimination against any student because of such student's religious belief or any absence thereof. Please let me know at least a week before the religious holiday so I might make appropriate changes to group work.

Do not get up to leave during class, please go to the bathroom, get water, etc. before class.

FYSS-101-24 (9:25am class)

Peer Facilitator: Beck Smith

Meeting time: Thurs. 4:05-4:55pm

Place: Bell 408

Contact: smithsb4@cofc.edu

Office hours:

#FYSS 101 Completion (100 points)

In addition to completing requirements for Environmental Storytelling, you are also required to complete the synthesis seminar with your peer facilitator. These weekly 50-minute courses will help introduce you to the College's academic community through the perspective and advice of a successful College of Charleston student. You must attend this seminar in order to achieve credit for FYE 134, which makes up 10% of

your grade here. If you do not attend a minimum of 60% of your peer facilitator classes (9 of 14) you will also fail this course and be required to take it again the following semester.

FYSS-101-25 (10:50am class)

Peer Facilitator: Kyleigh LeBoutillier

Meeting time: Tues. 4:05-4:55pm

Place: Bell 400

Contact: leboutillierkc@cofc.edu

Office hours:

Reading Guide

It is very important that you not only *read the assigned material*, but also that *you critically examine and interrogate it*. Throughout the semester we will work to recognize and critique arguments, set primary sources in context, and compare and contrast multiple readings and authors. As you read, you should take note of the issues and questions that you want to bring to the discussion. All members of the class, students and instructor alike, are responsible for understanding, explaining, analyzing and teaching the material under discussion.

The following questions should help you do so:

1. What is the major argument of the text? What evidence does she use to support her argument?
2. From what context is the author writing? What historical moment? How might that affect his writing?
3. What doesn't make sense to me? What is not clear? What are the strengths and weaknesses of their argument?
4. What other readings does this piece relate to from class? From my own experiences?

#OAKS journal posts (200)

To ensure that you complete and are critically evaluating the readings, you will be required to post weekly journal entries to OAKS. You will respond to prompts encouraging you to reflect on the contents of the lectures and reading assignments, drawing out facts or lessons that seem significant, and ask questions that help clarify something that's unfamiliar. The goal is not to think like me or think like everyone else but to develop your own reflection. You will be commenting on each reading assignment, video, and class discussion and activities from the week. Over the course of the semester, as you gain an increasingly complex understanding of environmental storytelling, your journal entries should be making connections among the various elements of the course. This should be a minimum of 300 words and pose at least one question to be asked in class. These questions can be drawn directly from the text or can be the result of thoughts you had by relating this specific text with previous readings you did or experiences you had.

Grading criteria: You must complete 8 of the 10 forum posts, due Monday nights. If you post less than 8 times, I will subtract 25 points per post you missed. You will have the opportunity to miss 2 posts without your grade being affected. Use these misses wisely and ideally not the first week of class. Please bring your discussion question with you to class. Forums will be graded on the following scale: 25 (excellent: clearly understood the argument, provided thoughtful critique, insights and questions, with evidence), 22 (good: recognized the argument, provided some critique, but failed to provide evidence), 18 (fair: the assignment is completed but the student did not carefully read or take adequate time to complete the post; information is missing), 15 (poor: the student did not address the above questions and/or the length of the post is inadequate), 0 (incomplete/missing). **Forum posts are due Monday nights by 10 pm.**

#Response Papers (200 points)

Task: Reinforce and apply critically readings, class discussions, and classroom exercises in a thesis-driven paper. No outside reading is necessary for these papers, which are intended for you to synthesize your own interpretation and analysis. Storytelling and fiction offer a path into environmental care, teaching us about the consequences of our current path and how we should engage the world around us in creative ways.

Paper 1 Nature Connections. For your first paper, reflect on an experience where you felt intimate or a "sense of kinship" with a landscape, a particular place, or an animal. Share the details of this experience, exploring the emotions,

sensory perceptions, and connections that made it memorable. As you write your narrative, draw parallels between your encounter and an Indigenous creation story from the Nenaboozho collection. Consider how the Indigenous narrative sheds light on the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world, emphasizing the religious, cultural, or ecological dimensions. Analyze the themes, symbols, and cultural contexts and discern how they relate to or challenge your own experience. How does your connection align with or differ from the Indigenous perspective? What insights can be gained by juxtaposing personal experiences with cultural narratives? In what ways does this exploration deepen your understanding of the relationships between humans, nature, and religion?

Paper 2: The Seed Keeper. This book grapples directly with themes of environmental degradation, specifically at the hands of corporate agriculture and genetically modified seeds protected by copyright. Ultimately, this corporate agricultural industry impacts the entire community in which Rosalie and her family are living. Further, Rosalie and Ida's friendship is a powerful reminder that while we inherit a past legacy from those who come before us, we each get to choose the way we allow that legacy to influence how we conduct our lives. Present two or three specific moments from the text that highlight environmental degradation and how it affects the community. Briefly describe the scenes and use short quotes as evidence. What elements of this conflict struck you? What impacts are industries like this one having on communities today? Find a contemporary (in the year 2023 or 2024) article about how a corporation is harming the environment to help you answer this question. Can we glean lessons on reconciliation, with others and with the earth, from relationships presented in the novel? What specific moments in the text teach these lessons?

Length: 500 to 750 words (2-3 pages). Please double-space. Eleven or twelve-point type is preferred. Upload a digital copy to OAKS before class begins. For citations, use parenthetical citations (Last name of author, page number) and include a works cited page.

Grading Criteria (100 Points Each): *20 Points* – Overall presentation of the paper (grammar, spelling, clarity of prose, and citations, as well as sentence and paragraph structure, flow, transitions, and organization); *30 Points:* Engagement with sources and course material (Does the paper adequately use quotations or summaries of sources in the explanation? Does the paper use the sources to develop and support a larger argument?) *50 Points:* Development of a thesis/argument (Is there a clear thesis statement? Was the thesis supported with evidence from the readings throughout the paper? Does the thesis answer the prompt? Does this paper go beyond merely restating the prompt to creatively engage with the material?)

#Final Creative Project (300 points)

Throughout the semester, we have read about the possible dystopic futures that come without action, the fictionalized narratives of those who live in particularly vulnerable communities in the present, myths about non-human relations, and importantly, the power of literary futurism to provide an avenue for creative problem solving. In this final project, you must write your own environmental stories with attention to the climate crisis, but also imaginative solutions. This can be presented as a short story, a film, or an art project. In addition, you will be required to include a reflection on the larger themes of the course: what happens when we look beyond our own experiences to understand how the climate crisis affects others? When we are given space to think creatively, rather than within limited or siloed disciplines about possible solutions? What lessons does storytelling around the world tell us about human responsibility and reciprocity with the environment?

Course Schedule (*in-class activities)

Date	Topic	What to Read/Watch/Do	What's Due
Unit 1: Introduction to Environmental Storytelling			
1/11	Introduction to the Course	Read the syllabus. Post any questions or confusions to the "Course Lounge" *What makes for a successful class? What are you most looking forward to? What is religion? Race? Nature?	
1/16	Types of storytelling	Watch, "The Power of Storytelling" by Sir Ian McKellan. https://vimeo.com/125383660 Read, <i>The Lorax</i> by Dr. Seuss	

		Why do we tell stories? What power do they have? What makes for an effective story?	
1/18	Science Stories	Wendy F. K’ah Skáahluwáa Todd, Arianna V. Northbird, and Chessaly E. Towne, “The Science in Indigenous Water Stories, Indigenous Women’s Connection to Water.” What is TEK? How do these stories tell similar things but in different ways?	
1/22	Journal post 1 due at 10pm on Monday		
Unit 2: Religion and Nature			
1/23	Religion & the Environment	Tucker and Grim, “The Movement of Religion and Ecology” (12 pages). *In class: Close reading of religious statements on the environment	
1/25	Religious Stories	Genesis 1-3 & Bhagavatam 10:16	
1/29	Journal post 2 due at 10pm on Monday		
1/30	Nature as Religion	Joel Garreau, “Environmentalism as Religion,” https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/environmentalism-as-religion *In class: read John Muir and Edward Abbey	
2/1	Native Stories	Choose one of three: (1) “Forward” and “How Chipmunk Got His Stripes” in <i>The Trail of Nenaboozhoo</i> . (2) “Coyote and the Pebbles” in <i>Trickster</i> . (3) “Four Worlds: The Dine Story of Creation” in <i>Keepers of the Earth</i> . *In class activity: jigsaw readings	
2/5	Journal post 3 due at 10pm on Monday		
2/6	Writing papers	Writing Workshop – Library Day	
2/8	In-class film	<i>There’s something in the water</i>	Paper 1 Due
Unit 3: The Seed Keeper			
2/13	The Seed Keeper	Diane Wilson, <i>The Seed Keeper</i> : Poem, Prologue, Chapters 1-4, pages 1-41.	
2/15	Dormancy I	Wilson, start reading Dormancy section	
2/19	Journal post 4 due at 10pm on Monday		
2/20	Dormancy II	Wilson, finish reading Dormancy section	
2/22	Germination I	Wilson, start reading Germination	
2/26	Journal post 5 due at 10pm on Monday		
2/27	Germination II	Wilson, finish reading Germination section	
2/29	Pollination	Wilson, read Pollination section	
3/4	Journal post 6 due at 10pm on Monday		
March 2-10 Spring Break			
3/12	Wačhékiye I	Wilson, start reading Wačhékiye section	
3/14	Wačhékiye II	Wilson, finish book	
3/19	In-class film	<i>Come Hell or High Water</i>	Paper 2 Due
Unit 4: Race and Nature			
3/21	Race & Nature	“Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race” and Cole and Foster, “We Speak for Ourselves” in <i>From the Ground Up</i> *In class: watch, “What do racism and poverty have to do with pollution and climate change?” https://youtu.be/dREtXUij6_c	
3/25	Journal post 7 due at 10pm on Monday		

3/26	Environmental Justice	Cole and Foster, "A History of the Environmental Justice Movement," in <i>From the Ground Up</i> .	
3/28	Environmental Collapse	Turner, "Catastrophic doom-loops could start in just 15 years," <i>LiveScience</i> . *In class: watch, "See what three degrees of global warming looks like," <i>The Economist</i> https://youtu.be/uynhvhZUOOo?si=raB2crt3gSlmCXOn	
4/1	Journal post 8 due at 10pm on Monday		
Unit 5: Parable of the Sower			
4/2	Parable of the Sower	Octavia Butler, "2024," <i>Parable of the Sower: Graphic Novel Adaption</i> *In class: watch https://youtu.be/X6YI8lsjJJA?si=ikQeTlbtEIJLor-p ; read Mark 4:3-41	
4/4	Afrofuturism	"2025," <i>Parable of the Sower</i> . *In class: watch https://youtu.be/bmEShkZaxuY?si=ZZHhge8m_22GVC0	
4/8	Journal post 9 due at 10pm on Monday		
4/9	Final Project Workshop	Brainstorming and workshopping your creative project What story do you want to tell? Why? How?	
4/11	No Class, Professor Keegan at Conference (IAAM make up day)		
4/16	African American Stories	"2026," <i>Parable of the Sower</i> . – Fieldtrip to International African American Museum at 4pm	
4/18	Our environmental future	Finish <i>Parable of the Sower</i> . *In class: local news activity	
4/22	Journal post 10 due at 10pm on Monday		
4/23	Wrap Up	Final project workshops and review	
Final Project Due: April 30 at 8 am			

The Fine Print. **Oaks:** OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted. **Grading Scale:** A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73- 76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below. **Late Policy:** Assignments are due at the beginning of the class unless otherwise noted. Any assignment turned in after the deadline is considered late. You will be penalized one letter grade (10%) for each day the assignment is late, up to a week. After a week, I will not accept the assignment. **Regarding plagiarism:** Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student's actions are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by the instructor. The instructor designs an intervention or assigns a grade reduction to help prevent the student from repeating the error. The response is recorded on a form and signed both by the instructor and the student. It is forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students and placed in the student's file. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook at: <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>. **Technology Use in Class:** We will be busy in every class session and we don't need any electronic distractions. Silence your cell phones before you enter the classroom. If it rings, I reserve the right to answer it. Laptops are allowed unless it becomes clear that students are misusing them. **Regarding AI and GPT:** Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) tools are not permitted for any work in this class. If you use GAI tools, your actions would be considered academically dishonest and a violation of the College of Charleston's Honor Code and Code of Conduct. All work submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the

College's Honor Code. You may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or make use of ChatGPT or other GAI tools. Since writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all writing assignments should be prepared solely by the student and without any assistance. Questions in this regard should be shared directly with your professor. Developing strong competencies in this area will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, support of any generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools is not permitted, and submissions using GAI will be treated as plagiarism per the College of Charleston's Honor Code. **Center for Student Learning:** The Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services provide assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. Services include tutoring, supplemental instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. The services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu>. **Mental & Physical Wellbeing:** At the college, we take every students' mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at <http://counseling.cofc.edu> or 843.953.5640 3rd Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, visit <http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php>, or meet with them in person 3rd Floor Stern Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health. **Diversity Statement:** Consistent with College of Charleston's commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, religious identity, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. Students are expected to be respectful of these differences in their conduct in class and on campus. **Accommodations:** We all learn in different ways. If you know or believe that you need additional help, the College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/>. **Email etiquette:** I am happy to communicate with you via email and will do my best to respond within 24 hours during the week. If it's 3 AM and you're feeling panicked, angry, frustrated, or annoyed, that most likely is NOT a good time to send an email. Ever. To me or anyone else. Take this as an important life lesson. It will serve you well. If you are sure that your questions or comments are professional and appropriate, be sure to include these professional courtesies: 1. In the subject line please indicate the content of the email and 2. Begin your message in the following manner: Dear Professor Keegan... And finish with sincerely, best, thanks, etc. followed by your full name. Do the same for every professor you're in contact with! Professionalism goes a long way.