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**Teaching the Humanities:  
Connecting Literature and Art to the Natural World**

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*Books cannot suffice as good learning without the experiencing the natural world. And even though we may teach students about nature in the classroom and pass on the wisdom from those who came before, it behooves us to every once in a while look outward to see how the natural world inspired the authors and artists we teach.*

Great Spirit, whose beautiful earth grows ugly with misuse,  
help us to find a way to restore beauty to your handiwork.  
- U.S. Environmental Sabbath Program

We live in a world that is steadily creeping toward absence of the natural world in favor of the artificial. We live in a world that favors a comfortable, sedentary indoor life wherein we can vicariously live a life filled with outdoor adventure through television. We live in a world in which we can have friends on Facebook we seldom, if ever, see. We live in a world that is awkwardly mimicked through virtual life, and yet we are assured that it is even better than the real world. We must wonder, will the world of our children be one in which they will be able to know about and be friends with the natural world? When we ask our students to sit still in a classroom to “learn,” what are we really teaching them? Teaching liberal studies, the humanities, surely requires balance. One (books) cannot suffice as good learning without the other (nature). And even though we may teach students about nature in the classroom and pass on the wisdom from those who came before, it behooves us to every once in a while look outward to see how the natural world informs the disciplines we teach.

The great 18<sup>th</sup> century Romantic poet William Wordsworth challenged book learning, chiding his friend to “quit your books” (“The Tables Turned” line Facebook we seldom, if ever, see. We live in a world that is awkwardly mimicked through virtual life, and yet we are assured that it is even better than the real world. We must wonder, will the world of our children be one in which they will be able to know about and be friends with

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The early 4<sup>th</sup> century stoic philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca (“Seneca the Younger”) explained, “why ‘liberal studies’ are so called is obvious: it is because they are the ones considered worthy of a free man. But there is really only one liberal study that deserves the name—because it makes a person free—and that is the pursuit of wisdom. Its high ideals, its steadfastness and spirit make all other studies puerile and puny in comparison” (“Letter LXXXVIII” 17). When Seneca uses the word “free man,” he means the Latin *liber*, the root word for *liberal*, which we use as our keystone for liberal studies, the humanities, in free and democratic societies.

The American Association of Junior and Community Colleges in 1991 redefined the humanities in more detail, and we can still adhere to its original idea as “ways of thinking about what is human—about our diverse histories, imaginations, values, words, and dreams. The Humanities analyze, interpret, and refine our experience, its comedies and tragedies, struggles and achievements. They embrace art and art history, literature and film, philosophy and morality, comparative religion, jurisprudence, political theory, language and linguistics, anthropology, and some of the inquires of

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the social sciences. When we ask who we are, and what our lives ought to mean, we are using the humanities” (McGrath).

Perhaps it is hubris to suggest that we need the humanities in the classroom more than ever before, but without the humanities we risk losing what is most important to us as “being human.” Imagine a university graduate who has little to no experience knowing art or reading any of the masters of literature. Imagine a university graduate who has just earned a degree in business but has no knowledge of philosophy. Imagine a university graduate who excelled in the sciences but doesn’t understand the questions ethics pose. The historian Donald Worster expounds further: “We are facing a global crisis today, not because how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them” (27).

It makes no sense to denigrate disciplines outside the humanities—we need a variety of knowledge to retain our competitive edge in the world, but without the humanities to complement a well-rounded education our thinking will become thin and lopsided. The Liberal Education Requirements (LERs) my university requires of every student addresses the need for a well-rounded education. They LERs ensure that students are exposed to the humanities *and* the sciences to complement learning.

If you think I am speaking of extremes, you are wrong. In my over thirty years of teaching at the college and university level, two students outright bragged to me that they had never opened a book—and had no intention to ever read one. Only two? you ask. Then multiply that by the students who every semester enter your classroom and mine having read “only what I have to,” and confessing that “I only write when I am required to do so.” These are some of the alarming signs that we are entering into an intellectual desert that bridges over to ignorance about our relationship with the natural world, which many ordinary citizens as well as powerful leaders in government ignore. If we cannot think philosophically, then how can we adequately think about or do science?

When the new administration came into office in 2017, scientists, who, as it turns out, were rightfully alarmed, began downloading their data for safekeeping because the newly elected president was openly skeptical about science (especially global warming). “As the presidential inauguration drew near in January, something bordering on panic was taking hold among

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some scientists who rely on the vast oceans of data housed on government servers, which encompass information on everything from social demographics to satellite photographs of polar ice” (Harmon). The Trump administration quickly proposed “deep budget cuts for government agencies including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency have fueled new fears of databases being axed” (Harmon).

On the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) website, the science and technology office had previously described its mission as the development of “scientific and technological foundations to achieve clean water.” That mission statement has been erased, and in its place is the new mission statement that the EPA’s goal is to develop “economically and technologically achievable performance standards” (qtd. in Harmon). Pie Charts on the Department of Energy’s website indicating a link between coal and greenhouse emissions that contribute to human-made climate change have also disappeared. This is not solely a “science” problem, nor solely a “humanities” problem. It is a problem in which willful ignorance has taken precedence over knowledge. Whether we collect scientific data in the laboratory or qualitative data in the humanities classroom, the two should come together in common cause to teach students about our responsibility to the natural world.

It is the job of educators to teach the data that science discovers. We have no room in the classroom for pet theories or beliefs that are outright wrong, such as the world is only 7,000 years old, that humans walked with dinosaurs, that the world is actually flat, or that evolution is a great big hoax. My own wake-up call came when a student in all seriousness announced that vampires are real. A student today can go through an entire four years of a university education and still insist that life began in the Garden of Eden, that humans walked with dinosaurs, and that evolution is a dangerous anti-God theory. Although it is not our job (nor should we want it) to shake students from their religious beliefs, it is our job to point out the difference between belief and fact whenever it arises. For this I am going to hell, as one student solemnly informed me.

How can we move students to accept what science teaches, especially about our responsibility to take care of the natural world, a responsibility that is also mentioned in the literature of the Bible? In humanities-based courses we cannot *demand* that students think differently, so a better way is to *introduce* students to authors who

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understand our place in nature and to artists who transform the written word into a visual feast. Many students most likely already do understand but lack the language to express their ideas fully. Teaching the humanities can help students articulate what it means to be human in the natural world. Rather than relegating “nature writing” to a sidebar of the literary canon, it should hold a firm position within the literary and the scientific canon of knowledge-making.

Consider Rachel Carson, a scientist in her own right, who in 1962 sounded the alarm about the harmful effects of DDT on birds in her seminal work *Silent Spring*. She reported that “In increasingly large areas of the United States spring now comes unheralded by the return of birds, and the early mornings are strangely silent where once they were filled with the beauty of bird song” (103). DDT, Carson learned, softened the birds’ eggshells, which made them too fragile to develop normally and hatch. Although her years of careful research initially earned her the derision of the pesticide industry, her book has crossed seamlessly from the science classroom to the literature classroom. She left us with a final warning that “If, having endured much, we have last asserted our ‘right to know,’ and if, knowing, we have concluded that we are being asked to take senseless and frightening risks, then we should no longer accept the council of those who tell us that we must fill our world with poisonous chemicals; we should look about and see what other course is open to us” (278). Despite the laughable defense of the pesticide industry, we heeded Carson’s advice and took another course.

Another book that finds itself in both classrooms is biologist Lewis Thomas’ *The Lives of a Cell*. This friendly little book is accessible to non-science students and bridges the gap between science and literature, all the while teaching students biology! Thomas embeds the human experience symbiotically with nature and says that “We are not made up, as we had always supposed, of successively enriched packets of our own parts. We are shared, rented, occupied” (2). He explains that “Our genomes are catalogues of instruction from all kinds of sources in nature, filed for all kinds of contingencies . . . I cannot feel as separate an entity as I did a few years ago, before I was told these things, nor, should I think can anyone else” (3). Both Carson and Thomas (among many other scientists) have bridged the gap between the worlds of sciences and literature, proving that one discipline can enrich the other and that both really need each other.

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The humanities aim for the same knowledge-obtaining goals as science does. Science depends on experimentation, replicating experiments to support findings, and its strength relies on the willingness to continually accept new data as knowledge evolves and discard refuted data. Scientists are scientists for the love of knowledge, for the love of unraveling the mysteries of nature, and for understanding our place in it, such as Carson and Thomas have done. Reading literature by authors who assign meaning to their lives (“being human”) within the context of the natural world lands students close to the same place as when they study science: learning how the world works, understanding their place in it, and assigning meaning to their lives. The humanities therefore already walk comfortably with the sciences. Either through data or literature or art, we understand that we cannot take the natural world for granted. Taking care of our planet begins with recognizing a very complex system of which we are a part, not apart from. When we recognize that we are responsible for being good stewards of the environment, we will be more apt to take care of it.

Teaching the humanities introduces students how to unravel the mysteries of nature, just in a different way than science does, and they strive just as mightily to understand their place in the world, just in a slightly different way. Consider the first Europeans who came to this continent; their first writings were about the struggle to reconcile themselves to what they believed was a wild and savage place, devoid of people. Instead they found the land already inhabited, a fact that consternated white Europeans to no end and became the result of much tragedy when the two civilizations clashed. The first European settlers in what was to become America busied themselves with “taming” the wilderness, turning it into a safe “middle landscape.” They cut down forests in the eastern part of the country and plowed fields where old-growth forests once stood. In Northwest Ohio, for example, they drained the Great Black Swamp to make it habitable for people. As a result of draining the swamp, they eradicated the habitat of wild animals, such as wolves, who were vilified as evil. The settlers formed a line, walking across fields to track and kill the very last wolf in the region (*The Story of the Great Black Swamp*). The woodchuck (groundhog) that was a rarity in Ohio lost its habitat because of deforestation but, unlike the demise of the wolf, they moved into open areas and multiplied to the point that they now live in every Ohio county and are considered a nuisance (“Woodchuck”).

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The American panther's moniker is sadly the "ghost cat" because its natural habitat in Florida has all but disappeared; sightings are rare. These cats have become victims of the highways that crisscross their Everglades habitat, and if one wants to catch a glimpse of a Florida panther, it will most likely be as roadkill. Just recently, the American Elk (caribou) has been officially declared absent from the lower forty-eight. Canada is transporting what remains of them to their side of the border to breeding pens to save their genetics ("End of an Era"). If we really care about the plight of wildlife in our modern world, we should not lament only the exotic, beautiful animals. To understand the severity and extent to which animals are losing their habits, we need only count the number of wildlife—the exotic and beautiful as well as the mundane and somewhat ugly—we come across each day that have been killed on roads.

Within these inevitable transformations of nature and yet hopeful beginnings for a better life in the New World emerged the 19<sup>th</sup> century New England Brahmins, Emerson and Thoreau, the transcendentalists who wrote extensively about what it means to tread lightly with nature. Instead of thinking about nature as a dark and evil place as their forebears had, they believed it had something different to offer. Granted, both lived in the civilized, middle-landscape New England town of Concord, Massachusetts, but the restless Thoreau often went into the deep woods of northern New England on weeks-long excursions and wrote extensively about his adventures.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, although teased for comparing himself to a "transparent eyeball," believed unequivocally in the connection between the human self and nature. He declared unabashedly that "Standing on the bare ground, —my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" ("Nature" 10). Emerson believed that "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. But if a man be alone, let him look at the stars (. . .) The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance" (9).

Emerson's friend, the 28-year-old Henry David Thoreau lived on Emerson's property at Walden Pond for two years (1845-47), two months and two days. It is no exaggeration to say that Thoreau inspired generations

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of Americans to go into the woods to “live deliberately.” He wrote about his experience in *Walden or Life in the Woods*, recognizing that “the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation” (8), an unfortunate affliction that many of us suffer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He expressed just about everyone’s wish for solitude, and he eloquently addressed our unsettling suspicion that we are not living fully. As isolated as Thoreau seemed to be at Walden Pond, he complained that he could hear the train’s whistle as it came rumbling by Concord. He welcomed occasional human visitors as well as his regular animal visitors, and he often walked into town to socialize at the local pub—he even managed to get himself arrested for refusing to pay his taxes, which landed him in jail for one night. Today, even more so than in Thoreau’s time, his words express our desire to live a quiet, contemplative life in harmony with the natural world: “I went into the woods because I wished to live deliberately to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach and not, when I came to die to discover that I had not lived” (65).

Thoreau also exalted the most ordinary of human activities, walking, in his essay by the same name. He marveled ruefully (and in a prescient nod to the 21<sup>st</sup> century worker) that there are people such as “my neighbors who confine themselves to shops and offices the whole day for weeks and months, ay, and years almost together” (363) without ever venturing outside to enjoy a walk. He praised the art of “sauntering,” explaining that its activity means “having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. For this is the secret of successful sauntering. He who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all; but the saunterer, in the good sense, is no more a vagrant than the meandering river” (365). He swore that in America “the immaterial heaven will appear as much higher to the American mind, and the intimations that star it as much brighter. For I believe that climate does react on man,—as there is something in the mountain-air that feeds the spirit and inspires. Will not man grow to greater perfection intellectually as well as physically under these influences?” (365). During his walks, Thoreau took extensive notes about when flowers bloomed, and as an excellent illustration of the writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century joining hands with the scientists of the 21<sup>st</sup>, Thoreau’s notebooks are used to measure how global warming has affected New England plant life.

As the New England area became settled, Americans became restless and looked to the wider expanse of the West to live. The painters of



the Hudson River School transformed the words of their American author counterparts into a visual feast. They saw a different kind of America, one in which they paid homage to its wild landscape, mostly untouched by humans. The Prussian-born John Gast depicted in his 1872 painting “American Progress” an allegory for America’s philosophy of Manifest Destiny.



--John Gast, “American Progress” 1872

This painting, more than any other, illustrates the so-called progress of the European settlers who traveled west and changed the natural landscape, and nearly destroyed the people who lived there. John Winthrop’s 1630 “City Upon a Hill” sermon aboard the *Arabella* defined what would become the basis of “American Exceptionalism” that foreshadowed the visual idea of Manifest Destiny in Gast’s painting: “Wee shall finde that the God of Israell is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when hee shall make us a prayse and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, ‘the Lord make it like that of New England.’ For wee must consider that wee shall be as a citty upon a hill. The eies of all people are upon us” (Winthrop).

In Gast’s painting, “Progress” leads the settlers west across the Mississippi and across the Plains from the sunlit civilized east to the darkening skies of the west that signal danger and the unknown. The star on her head represents “American Empire,” and wrapped around her left arm she drags a telegraph wire. In her right arm she carries a schoolbook, signifying reliance on book learning, thereby relegating learning from the

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natural world to the dry obscurity of books. The white settlers are on Conestoga wagons, horseback, and stagecoach, driving bison and Native Americans ahead of them off their ancestral lands. In one corner farmers are tilling the land, and in the far background is the ever-present railroad, the iron horse that shattered the lives of Native Americans (“American Progress”). White hunters who thrilled to the bison hunt shot them by the millions from the safety and comfort of the train, and then left their carcasses to rot in the prairie sun (*The Buffalo War*). By 1883, only eleven years after Gast’s painting, the last of the great bison herds had been slaughtered for sport, effectively eliminating a critical food source as well as an important cultural and religious symbol for the Plains Indians. The great herds of bison that once numbered in the millions were reduced to less than one thousand, forcing the destitute Plains Indians onto the reservations. The 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee spelled the death knell for the Native Americans’ freedom and way of life, and the West was officially declared “closed.” For the Native Americans who revered the bison and depended on them for sustenance, this was an unbelievably shameful and immoral act against the natural world.

Another important painting of the Hudson River School that holds cultural significance is the 1855 depiction of the “Lackawanna Valley” by George Inness.



--George Inness, “Lackawanna Valley” 1855

This painting highlights a somewhat uneasy alliance between technology and nature, a tamed landscape of farms and domesticated farm

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animals surrounding the Delaware river. The ever-present railroad slices through the bucolic Pennsylvania Lackawanna Valley, which is now transformed into a middle-landscape, devoid of wild animals and Native Americans who were two decades later chased even farther away in Gast's "American Progress" painting of the westward expansion. Innes cautioned that "Some persons suppose that landscape has no power of communicating human sentiment. But this is a great mistake" ("George Innes"). Perhaps Innes, whose painting was commissioned by a corporate patron, intended to transmit the feeling of a peaceful, bucolic landscape that joins harmoniously with "American Progress." Indeed, there is a farm boy sitting in a relaxed pose on the hillside, overlooking the scene. The hay is neatly stacked, so we know it is at the end of a productive summer harvest. Tree stumps in the foreground signify that the wilderness has been pushed back. And depending on how we interpret the scene, lazy factory smoke in the distance signifies technology's progress or its encroachment.

Whereas the Yosemite Valley was painted extensively by Hudson River School artists such as Albert Bierstadt, the 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist John Muir painted his beloved Yosemite with words. He developed an intimate relationship with the Yosemite, endlessly walking the valley and writing about it. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Yosemite National Park in 1890, ensuring its safety from human exploitation and destruction, and in 1892 he founded the Sierra Club. He was so enthralled with the Yosemite—its gigantic thousands-years-old Sequoias, its sheer cliffs, its animal life, the rivers, the flowers—that in 1903 he took Theodore Roosevelt on a camping trip to let him see for himself why the Yosemite needed protection. Roosevelt marveled about the trees and noted, "Who of all the dwellers of the plains and prairies and fertile home forests of round-headed oak and maple, hickory and elm, ever dreamed that earth could bear such growths,—trees that the familiar pines and firs seem to know nothing about, lonely, silent, serene, with a physiognomy almost godlike; and so old, thousands of them still living had already counted their years by tens of centuries when Columbus set sail from Spain and were in the vigor of youth or middle age when the star led the Chaldean sages to the infant Saviour's cradle" (*Our National Parks*).

Roosevelt took Muir's plea to heart. He created the U.S. Forest Service in 1905, and in 1906 he signed into law the Antiquities Act to protect the Yosemite. But ranchers continued to use the Yosemite Valley for grazing ground and indiscriminate hunting. Although an avid hunter himself,

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Roosevelt recognized the value of preserving the Yosemite for “the ever-increasing numbers of men and women who have learned to find rest, health, and recreation in the splendid forests and flower-clad meadows of our mountains. The forest reserves (. . .) should be set apart forever for the use and benefit of our people as a whole and not sacrificed to the shortsighted greed of a few” (qtd. in Worster 370).

Muir understood that “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike” (*The Yosemite*). He understood the trees perhaps better than anyone, as well as the symbiotic relationship between plant and human life in which both must live in harmony in order to survive: “Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away; and if they could, they would still be destroyed—chased and hunted down as long as fun or a dollar could be got out of their bark hides. Branching horns, or magnificent bole backbones” (*First Summer in the Sierra* 231). Muir intuitively understood before science ever confirmed it that trees which take centuries to grow are far superior to younger trees that are grown in modern tree farms. Young trees are inevitably incapable to do what ancient trees accomplish as the lungs of the world—provide the world with clean air. Muir was enchanted by the sheer might and beauty of ancient trees such as the Yosemite Sequoia, and he became the champion of these voiceless giants. “Few that fell trees plant them; nor would planting avail much towards getting back anything like the noble primeval forests. It took more than three thousand years to make some of the trees in these Western woods—trees that are still standing in perfect strength and beauty, waving and singing in the mighty forests of the Sierra” (231). He admonished us that “Through all the wonderful, eventful centuries God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempests and floods; but he cannot save them from fools—only Uncle Sam can do that” (231).

In 1924 in a letter to his wife, Muir observed that “It has been said that the trees are imperfect men, and seem to bemoan their imprisonment rooted in the ground. But they never seem so to me. I never saw a discontented tree. They grip the ground as though they liked it, and though fast rooted they travel about as far as we do. They go wandering in all directions with every wind, going and coming like ourselves, traveling with us around the sun two million miles a day, and through space heaven knows how fast and far” (*Life and Letters of John Muir*).

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Through his many books and essays, John Muir elevated the life of trees into the realm of the American conscience as important to know, important to protect, and important for the natural world—as if our very lives depend on it.

Yet another American writer who loved the natural world is Mark Twain. We cannot read Twain and fail to appreciate the great love he held for *his* river. The river defined Mark Twain. The river sustained Mark Twain. The river, we may even say with some certainty, was Mark Twain's alter ego. We cannot think of the mighty Mississippi without thinking about Mark Twain. Like his English counterpart William Wordsworth, Twain recognized the superiority of nature's education over book learning. When he was a riverboat pilot, he said that "The face of the water, in time, became a wonderful book. (. . .) I stood like one bewitched. I drank it in, in a speechless rapture. The world was new to me, and I had never seen (. . .) anything like this" (*Life on the Mississippi* 431). He declared that the book "was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice. And it was not a book to be read once and thrown aside, for it had a new story to tell every day" (431).

Without a doubt, Twain's most significant American character is the Mississippi River, and he was clever enough to place Huck Finn and his friend Jim on that river. Through Huck, Twain expressed his love for the river and his awe of it. Huck is essentially Twain in this respect. Huck calls the river "monstrous," but she is also Huck and Jim's protector, cradling them in such a motherly way that they announce fervently, "it's lovely to live on a raft" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* 136). On that river, Huck/Twain falls into a reverie, declaring in hushed tones that there is "Not a sound, anywhere—perfectly still—just like the whole world was asleep, only sometimes the bull-frogs a-cluttering, maybe" (135).

Twain's gift to the modern world is our awareness and appreciation of the fragileness of our waterways. Due in large part because Twain elevated and exalted the river into the American consciousness, in 1988 a 72-mile stretch of the Mississippi River in the St. Paul, Minnesota region was awarded the status of national park and was deemed "a nationally significant historical, recreational, scenic, cultural, natural, economic and scientific resource" (McCormick). It is the only water national park in America and the only river to receive such honors.

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Today, the ongoing struggle between “progress” and protecting the natural world, especially our waterways, continues. Recently in 2019, “A federal judge in Alaska declared (. . .) Trump’s order revoking a sweeping ban on oil and gas drilling in the Arctic and Atlantic oceans is illegal, putting 128 million acres of federal waters off limits to energy exploration” (Eilpirin). We should take our lessons from this country’s first inhabitants, the Water Protectors who are currently fighting to keep our waters clean. Their mission to teach us that all waters are sacred have never come at a more critical time.

Currently, the Water Protectors are protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline that cuts across the Missouri River north of the Standing Rock Reservation. But think about how easily we dismiss the sacredness of all water everywhere, large or small, famous or not so famous. Whether we dismiss the Mississippi or the Cuyahoga River; whether we take for granted Lake Erie or Lake LaDue; whether we complacently expect clean drinking water from our taps in Ohio, or are aghast about the poisoned water from the Detroit River in Flint, Michigan—water is our life-blood just as much as clean air and healthy trees.

In 2019, the West Virginia Manufacturers Association argued successfully to change clean water standards in the state, “partly . . . because so many state residents are obese, [and therefore] their bodies can handle more pollution from coal and chemical plants” (“Only in America” 6). The manufacturers’ so-called logic is that “The new EPA-backed regulations don’t account for several factors, including body weight” (6). Is it any wonder that we become discouraged trying to separate facts from wishful thinking, or that we express outright denial about what we have done to the natural world? In a statement of support for all Water Protectors, “Rather than treating nature as property under the law, the time has come to recognize that nature and all our natural communities have the right to exist, maintain and regenerate their vital cycles. And we – the people – have the legal authority and responsibility to enforce these rights on behalf of ecosystems. The ecosystem itself can be named as a rights-bearing subject with standing in a court of law” (“The Rights of Nature”).

These are only a few of American stories in print, art, and current life that teach us that nature is not “outside” lurking like a stranger, but everywhere, and the everywhere begins with understanding that Earth is our only home. We should be confident that most of our students already know this. Reading poetry, novels, and memoirs; admiring art; and doing

science function as a reminder about our connection to the natural world and our responsibility to protect it as best we can, and links us to *why* we love our home so much. In quiet ways we can all do our part throughout the disciplines. We have a professor at our campus who teaches Native American literature; she is a Water Protector who has witnessed the oil industry's disregard for the water and the land on which Native Americans live. Another professor who teaches middle childhood education volunteered at our own backyard Cuyahoga Valley National Park this past summer. We have a science professor who teaches about the environment as an integral part of her science courses.

Students may already be *for* the environment, and we have the tools to educate and help them achieve their desire to be active and responsible citizens who step lightly in the natural world—whether we teach them through the humanities or the sciences.

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