

Course Title:	Writing the Natural World: Inquiry & Exploration
Grade(s):	12

Course Description
In this senior elective, students will be introduced to many authors who have expressed themselves through the medium of the short story, poetry, science writing, and narrative nonfiction. The focus is on developing skills and practicing techniques for fiction and nonfiction composition as well as reading diverse texts on topics inspired by and about the environment. Students will be asked to consider the world around them in new ways through direct interaction with the natural world. The class will focus on field studies in order to watch, feel, listen, and experience the world around them, to appreciate and engage with local nature, and to document their experiences as a resource for the coursework. In addition, students will read works by nature writers and interact with local scientists and naturalists to consider the relationship between writing and sustainability. Senior English electives have the option to contract for Honors level. Contract Leveling allows students the opportunity to earn honors credit. Honors students will be required to explore a sustained independent project in addition to the work expectations of the class. More details will be presented at the beginning of each semester.
Approved Curricular Materials/Textbook(s)
Students will read a selection (complete and in excerpt) of poems, short stories, essays, and films, as well as the novel <i>Dry</i> by Jarrod and Neal Shusterman.

Unit Title	Unit Description (Include Unit Objectives)	Unit Pacing
Unit 1: Capturing the Details	By the end of this opening unit, students will have explored how being outdoors can strengthen their writing by spending time in real places around the school grounds. They will keep a field notebook in which they practice noticing small details, sounds, textures, movement, and light, and will learn how these details make writing more vivid and engaging. By the end of the unit, students will compose an original place-based “spooky story” rooted in the local details they’ve collected. They use their outdoor observations to build mood, suspense, and a strong sense of place.	4 weeks (September) (February-March)*

Unit 2: Snapshots of Our Environment	Students will read the novel <i>Dry</i> as both a mentor text and an independent reading book. With a focus on an emerging issue connected to nature and the environment, students will engage in research. The novel will help students see how authors and researchers use setting, sensory details, and tension to tell meaningful stories about people and the natural world. By the end of the unit, students will compose a collection of short, place-based scenes that show why the issue matters. These “snapshots” blend observation, description, and realistic fiction to help readers imagine the stakes of the problem.	5 weeks (October-November) (March-April)*
Unit 3: Work, Renewal & Imagination	In this unit, students will examine how writers across different time periods use nature, work, and the human spirit to make sense of the world. Students move through seminal works of three major literary movements (Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and Naturalism). By reading across centuries and writing in multiple forms, students will learn how creative expression and careful analysis work together to deepen understanding of both the natural world and the human experience. There are three assessments at different stages of this unit, including a close reading analysis paragraph, an original poem focused on their own experiences of renewal through work, and a group poster that asks them to distill the literary movements through comparison.	5 weeks (November-December) (April-May)*
Unit 4: The Wild/Tame Divide	In this final unit, students study fairy tales as a storytelling tradition that reveals the hopes, fears, and values of the cultures that produce them. They compare traditional tales with modern retellings, both in print and film, to see how the same story patterns evolve. A central lens of the unit is the contrast between the wild and the tame, how stories define these ideas, how they shift across cultures and eras, and what they suggest about human nature. The unit culminates in a return to the environmental issue they researched in the first half of the course to write an original fairy tale that uses genre conventions and the wild/tame binary to shed new light on the issue. This project allows them to blend creativity, cultural understanding, and real-world concerns.	4 weeks (December-January) (May-June)*

* Second Semester