



LITERATURE OF NATURE

Writing and the exploration of literary expressions about nature.

ANIMARI
Bringing Life to Learning

Overview This course is designed to take 12-14 weeks, but the student can complete the coursework at whatever speed she or he desires. Themes surveyed include:

1. Myths of Interconnection between people and nature from African, Native American, Asian, and European contexts exploring:

- The tradition of contact with the divine in nature.
- Shapeshifting and fluid boundaries between species.
- Marriages to fish, snakes, and other animals.
- Ancestry tales: origin stories from marriages between people and animals.

2. European Colonization of America.

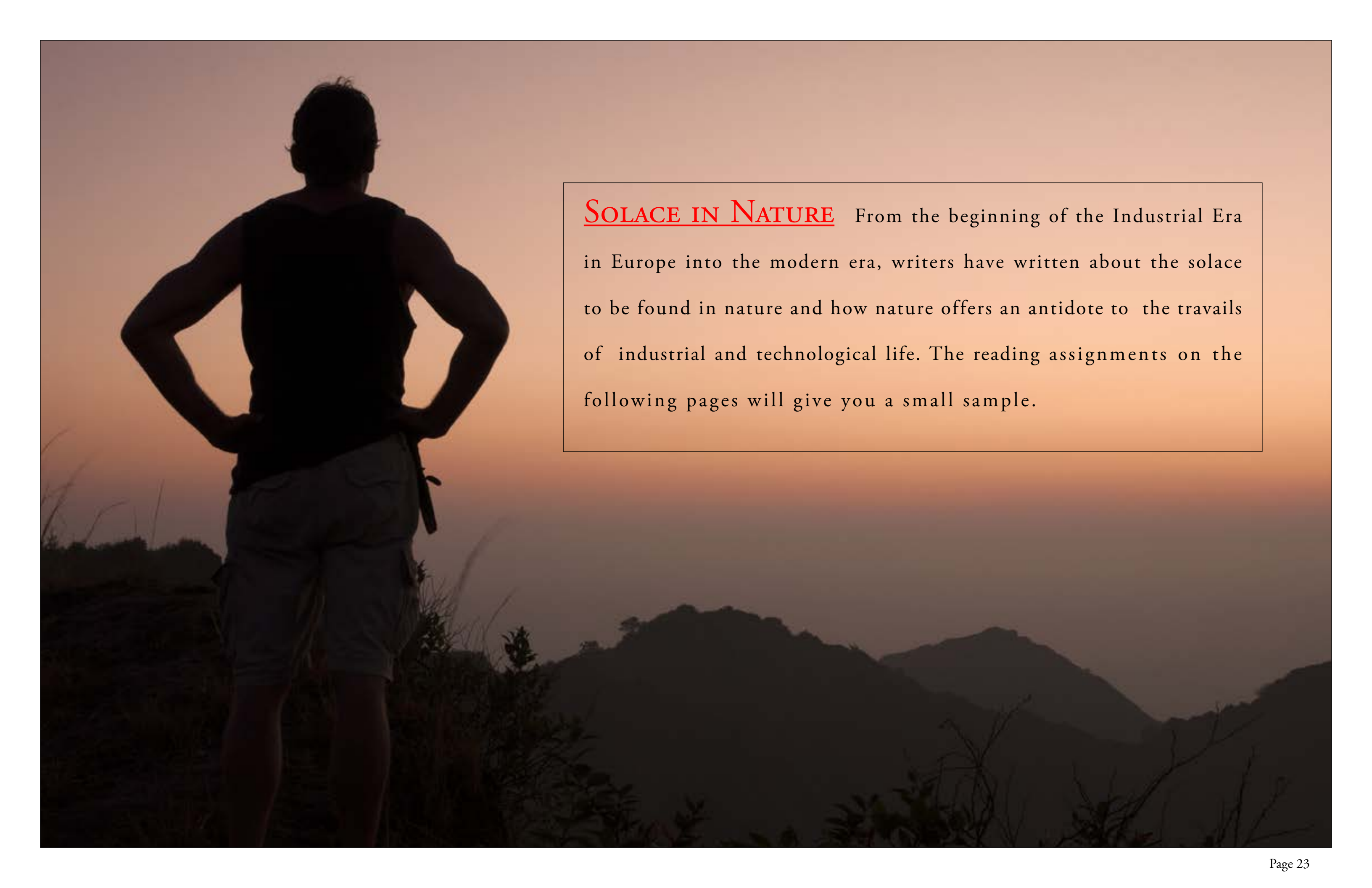
3. The Transition into the Modern Era.

4. Solace in Nature.

5. Advocacy for the Environment.

Course Assignments: Writing is central to this course. Students write two essays (three to four pages) responding to course materials and readings.

Essays explore themes covered in course readings. Separate instructions are provided for each essay. The instructor provides detailed feedback on structure, language, and overall writing quality of essays. Over 200 pages of readings, five audio talks, and 11 videos are compiled for students by writers and leaders at the forefront of the environmental movement including Robin Moss Kimmerer, David Abram, Elizabeth Kolbert, Thomas Berry, Sandra Postel, Theodore Roszac, Linda Hogan, Sigurd Olson, Greta Thunberg, Sherri Mitchell, Bill McKibben, and Jane Goodall. Shorter essay questions offer students the chance to develop critical thinking on course readings and material. In these shorter writing exercises, students can write creatively and less formally, as in journal writing, and draw upon their own experiences, backgrounds, and ideas. The instructor will not critique these responses as to the quality of writing, but rather to the quality of critical thought the student displays. Students complete a total of six to eight pages of formal essay writing and five to eight pages of shorter essay questions.

A silhouette of a person standing with their hands on their hips, looking out over a mountain range at sunset. The person is on the left side of the frame, and the mountains are in the background. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The person is wearing a dark tank top and light-colored shorts. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

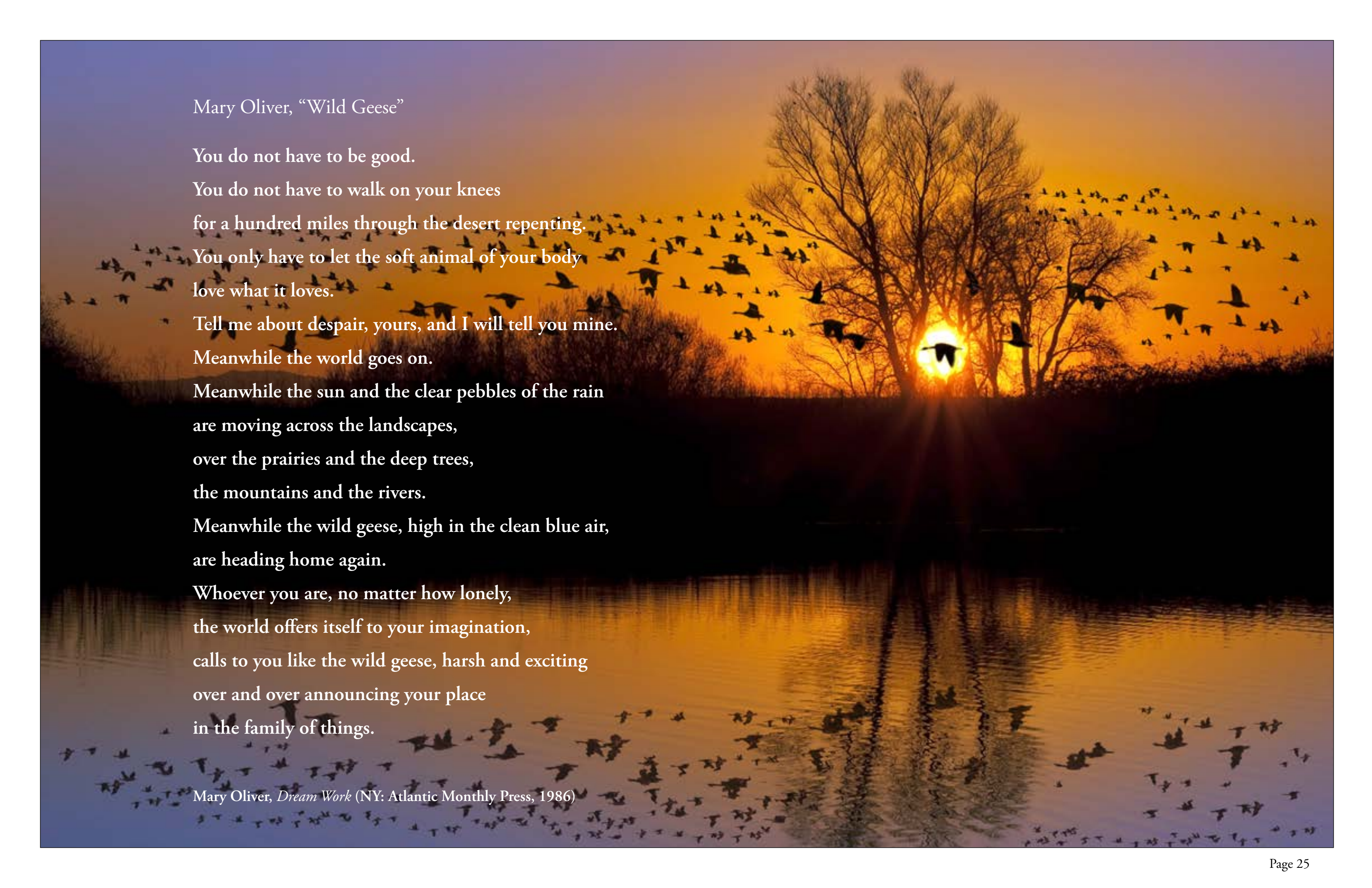
SOLACE IN NATURE From the beginning of the Industrial Era in Europe into the modern era, writers have written about the solace to be found in nature and how nature offers an antidote to the travails of industrial and technological life. The reading assignments on the following pages will give you a small sample.



Wendell Berry, "The Peace of Wild Things"

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Wendell Berry, The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1998).



Mary Oliver, "Wild Geese"

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain

are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,

are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting

over and over announcing your place

in the family of things.

Mary Oliver, *Dream Work* (NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986)

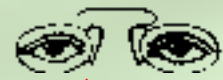
I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the mourning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.


The Lake Isle of Innisfree by William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (NY: Scribner, 1996)





READING ASSIGNMENTS

John Muir, *Mountains of California*, pgs. 185-195. 

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," *Excursions*, pgs. 21-22. 

Thoreau, "Solitude," *Walden*. Read from bottom paragraph 172 through 183. 

Thoreau, "Sounds," *Walden*, pgs. 146-50. 



WRITING EXERCISES #3 & 4

3. Write about your reactions to the event Muir describes. What do you notice about the way he writes? Find examples from this passage of sensory detail Muir supplies (visual, auditory, tactile and olfactory).

Then write about the various storms you've witnessed or experienced. Have you ever been caught outdoors in a storm? What was it like? Describe the sounds, sights, feel, and smells if possible. Were you afraid, or did you find the storm exhilarating in the way Muir does in his treetop? Write 3-4 paragraphs.

4. Write about one or more of the poems by Berry, Oliver, and Yeats. What themes do they share? What speaks to you? How is nature offered as an antidote to the hardships of the modern world in these poems? Write 2-3 paragraphs.

