Program Outline

# Introduction

Hi, I’m Madison Woods and I’m excited to be here this afternoon to talk **nature writing & journaling** with you!

# Here’s a little background on me and my relationship with nature.

I’ve always loved the outdoors.

There’s a book I read as a child that had a huge impact on the adult I grew into.

**That book was My Side of the Mountain.**

How many of you have read it or at least heard about it?

# A very short synopsis

A boy runs away home in the city and lives off the land in the woods & shelters inside a large hollowed-out tree. **The book was pure nature-writing.**

*And it was fiction.*

So you see, nature writing can be both fiction and non-fiction.

Many people think of it only as nonfiction.

These are traits of a nature writer and the way they can manifest:

* **Curiosity – ask questions**
* **Imagination – hypothesize answers**
* **Love of nature – feels awe**
* **Desire to share – write, art, photography**

History of Nature Writing

There are many European nature writers and especially poets. Natural scientists like Charles Darwin were also nature writers. I think you can count even the cave drawings as perhaps our first example of nature writing. Coexisting with nature was the sum total of life at that time. Early American explorers wrote accounts of things they encountered, but there was one man who set the stage for American Nature Writing.

# The first American Nature Writer

## Henry David Thoreau

His writings are the foundation of American nature writing. Although explores gave vivid accounts of nature here as they encountered it, Thoreau’s book “Walden” established the genre.

I love the opening paragraphs of Thoreau’s essay on walking and I’d like to read the part about the origin of the word “saunter”. I don’t think I can consider myself a “saunterer”. I have always known I am a meanderer.

**[Pass out excerpt (handout #1)]**

**From Thoreau’s “Walking”**

“I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks, - who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering, which word is beautifully derived "from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretense of going a la Sainte Terre," to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, "There goes a Sainte-Terrer," a Saunterer, a Holy-Lander.

They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds ; but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense, such as I mean.

Some, however, would derive the word from sans terre, without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, 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 vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the shortest course to the sea.”

**[Pass out list of nature writers (handout #2)]**

Today’s Nature Writers

# The first nature writers often incorporated drawings into their writing, especially in their journals. Today’s nature writers do that still, but they often also use photography.

# How many of you keep journals?

# How many of you incorporate other mediums into your writing or journaling, like art or photography?

I usually do. I personally like the added visual dimensions, both in my own work and in the ones I most enjoy reading.

# Examples of modern nature writing

My own

# Wild Ozark and Wild Ozark Nature Journal

* My nature writing tends to be mostly about plants and my life on our homestead in the Ozark backwoods. (photo essay)
* Pondering on the nature of humans (philosophical)
* Poetry (Ode to Nature)

# Bird light wind – Kitundu

* Photo essay example

# Naturewriting.com – and talk about the invitation to submit

The editor for this publication, which is an online magazine, has extended an invitation for any of you to submit your nature writing to the magazine. In your query, mention that you were a participant in my class. There are submission guidelines on the website and he also added that it’s a good idea to make sure he has your email address if it changes in the future because he always contacts authors when another organization wants to use your article. He is often contacted by nature conservancy groups or government tourism or other government agencies for reprint rights on some articles.

*[****Pass out naturewriting.com info****]*

**If any of you have never submitted or communicated with an editor before, I brought a series of emails between myself and the editor for Blazing Star, the publication for the North American Botanical Society. It’s just to give you an idea of their humanity, mostly. The editor for the online zine I mentioned above was equally human.**

**Let me know before we end the workshop if you’d like to read them.**

Useful Tools

* Camera
* Notepad
* Sketchpad
* Recorder
* 100 word “captures”
* Collect an item to sketch
* After the walk, we’ll come back to write a short piece inspired by what we’ve seen, felt, heard or smelled.
* Then if you’d be willing, we can share our stories.
* Something I do that’s been very helpful to me is to write short “captures”. I usually do this in 100-word flash fiction, but it can be done in non-fiction captures too.
* I use these shorts for content on my blog, and then I use them like idea files or seed files, to use in scenes or stories later where they fit.

Nature Walk

Sharing

Sketching