

## Arts & Science 3TR3 Trees Inquiry

2017-18 (Term 1); Mondays, 2:30-5:30 pm, LRW 2012

Dr. A. McQueen, ajmcq@mcmaster.ca; Office hours: Mon 2-2:30 and 5:30-6pm (TSH-407)

Inspired by the trees on McMaster's campus, this course examines trees and their significance through a number of different lenses and from a variety of discipline perspectives: biology, colonial and economic histories; visual, material and performing arts practices; psychology; indigenous and environmental studies; poetry and prose. The course will meet in classroom settings, it will move to various locations outdoors on campus and will go off campus for field trips. You will need to come to class prepared to be on the move by wearing comfortable clothing and shoes. When we move from the interior classroom to the outdoors, you will want to carry a light backpack, with a minimum of weight and only essential items such as: a pen and medium-sized notebook or pad of paper and a small bottle of water. You will also need to plan for various weather conditions and on any given Monday afternoon plan to bring items appropriate for your personal needs such as: protective sunscreen, hat, rain jacket or full rain gear (jacket, pants, and preferably a hat over an umbrella so that your hands are free).

### Required texts:

Higgins, Richard. *Thoreau and the Language of Trees*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017.

Stafford, Fiona. *The Long, Long Life of Trees*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

### Course Schedule

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| September 11 | Introductory class: Campus Tree Hunt<br>discussion of <i>Portrait of a Tree</i> assignment  |
| September 18 | <i>Portrait of a Tree</i> assignment, group 1<br>discussion of Principal Research Project   |
| September 25 | <i>Portrait of a Tree</i> assignment, group 2<br>finalizing of topics for Principal Research Project  |
| October 2    | Reading assignment: Fiona Stafford, <i>The Long, Long Life of Trees</i><br>Discussion of <i>Trees and the Visual Arts</i> assignment<br>In-class activities: Nature walk and seated meditation<br>Before this class meeting you may wish to consult the following:<br><a href="https://www.tarabrach.com/howtomeditate/">https://www.tarabrach.com/howtomeditate/</a> |
| October 9    | Thanksgiving Day - no class   |
| October 16   | Mac Forest Field Trip<br>Reading assignment: Richard Higgins <i>Thoreau and the Language of Trees</i><br>In-class activities: Forest walk and journaling exercise   |

Before this class meeting you may wish to consult the following:  
<http://www.shinrin-yoku.org/>  
Other resources of potential interest:  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/06/walking/304674/>  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/10/autumnaltints/308702/>

- October 23            *Trees and the Visual Arts* assignment, group 1
- October 30            *Trees and the Visual Arts* assignment, group 2
- November 6            Royal Botanical Gardens Arboretum Field Trip  
In-class activities: Walking meditation and asana exercise  
Before this class meeting you may wish to review the following:  
<http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/articles/instructions-for-walking-meditation/>
- November 13           Presentations of Principal Research Projects, group 1
- November 20           Presentations of Principal Research Projects, group 2
- November 27           Presentations of Principal Research Projects, group 3
- December 4            Presentations of Principal Research Projects, group 4
- December 21           Principal Research Project papers are due on or before noon on this date

### **Assessments**

#### ***Portrait of a Tree* assignment, September 18<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup>, 20%**

During our first class, we will go on an exploratory Campus Tree Hunt that will "introduce" us to 20 different trees. Each of you will then focus on one of the trees from the hunt for this *Portrait of a Tree* assignment. In Week two of class we will return to 10 of the trees, and in Week three of class we will return to the remaining 10 trees. During these return visits, each of you will present your research as a "portrait" of "your" respective tree. Many consider teaching the highest form of learning, and this assignment will be the first of several opportunities in this class to explore how that perspective applies to you. Your assignment will include two outcomes: you will give a 10-minute presentation, followed by no more than 5 minutes during which you will answer questions from the class; and you will also submit a one-to-two-page (single-spaced) paper that outlines the key points of your presentation. Your presentation, paper, and response to questions will all be graded as a whole. Your *Portrait of a Tree* should draw on research from various discipline-based perspectives. It should include an in-depth discussion of the tree from a biological perspective, identifying the features or markers that are considered representative and including information related to what can be seen in different seasons. Your *Portrait* can

also draw upon some of the following ideas, as relevant, and others as you choose: the geographic origin of the type of tree; the history of its presence in North America; its significance in specific cultural contexts; if it has been the focus of a particular economic or environmental concern; and if there is a work of poetry or prose that focuses on the type of tree, and you wish to include it you can do so in whole or in part, as time permits. Please include other lines of inquiry as you deem appropriate for the tree that is your focus as well as the resources you have found. Be sure to manage your time, and do a test run of your presentation as no one *Portrait* will be allowed to go longer than 10 minutes, so that we respectfully ensure there is enough time for all of the presentations on each day. Your paper will be due on the same day as your oral presentation. Your paper must include a bibliography that follows a consistent format (such as Chicago or APA) that includes all of your sources. There are quite a number of helpful websites related to tree identification, organized through botanical gardens, universities, nature conservancy groups and other botany-focused organizations, and you can certainly use (and cite) those sources. Your research must, however, extend well beyond web-based research and explore journal articles, books, or works of creative writing that are relevant for a broad understand of the tree type that is the focus of your assignment.

### **Trees and Visual Arts assignment, October 23<sup>rd</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup>, 15%**

This assignment is designed as a vehicle for you to learn more about how trees have intersected with the visual arts across a broad range of historical periods and geographic locations. Wood has been an indispensable support for paintings, and is an important scientific means of dating works of art. It has been carved and shaped into sculptural forms that have been valued for their aesthetic and/or functional roles. Trees have inspired visual artists to take their art supplies out of the studio, and to undertake studies and complete works of art out of doors. Trees have been an important vehicle for exploring abstraction, for eschewing the concerns of urban life, and for commenting on the significance of environmental issues in contemporary life. During class on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, you will be introduced to a range of possible topics, and will either select one for this assignment (or you can propose your own topic during class time on the same day).

Half of the class will present their assignment on October 23<sup>rd</sup> and the other half will present on October 30<sup>th</sup>. You will use one or more images to illustrate your presentation which will consider, as relevant to your topic: the cultural context for the creation of the work; its historical significance; if the person who produced the work is known, you will address why the work was important to her or him and/or what was he/she trying to express. If you are discussing how wood has been used as a support for painting, you will consider the type(s) of trees used, the practical concerns for artists using such supports, the periods in history when such practices were common, and when and why practices shifted to other supports. If you are studying the dating of works made from wood you will want to include in your presentation images that illustrate technical approaches as well as the works of art that are the basis of your scientific discussion. You should familiarize yourself with ARTstor, a digital image library accessible through the library website. Some of you will use images from ARTstor, and some of you will find images primarily through web searches. Your assignment will include two outcomes: 1) you will give a 10-minute presentation, followed by no more than 5 minutes during which you will answer questions from the class, and 2) you will submit a bibliography, due on the same day as your oral

presentation, which will consistently follow a format (such as Chicago or APA) that is familiar to you, and that will include all of your sources for this assignment. Your research must emphasize scholarly journal articles, books and/or exhibition catalogues. To a lesser degree, you can use websites such as those connected with museums or research projects, where information is generally reliable. You must not use base any of your research on web-based resources that have commercial or tourist contexts or that are personal in nature.

### **Participation and Engagement with Course materials, 30%**

This part of the course assessment evaluates not just that each person is physically present for class. For our course to be successful this semester, we must each not just be present in body but actively engaged through our minds, attentive to others, and open to our exploratory, in-class activities, including our field trips.

When you **participate** and **engage**: you are consistently connected; you contribute to class discussions; you are an active listener; you take notes when your peers are giving presentations; and you offer constructive feedback to presentations, remaining considerate of the parameters of our time together and that we need to ensure everyone has opportunities to contribute. You will need to arrive on time for each class and you will need to be mindful if/when the class meets on campus somewhere other than LRW 2012, for example for the *Portrait of a Tree* assignment and field trips.

Your **analysis of the readings** is part of your participation grade. We will read and discuss two books: Stafford's *The Long, Long Life of Trees* (October 2nd) and Higgins' *Thoreau and the Language of Trees* (October 16th). You will need to be well prepared for the in-class discussions, and should bring either your handwritten notes or a printed copy of any notes you have recorded electronically. Please do not plan to consult notes on any device. Your contributions to class discussion of the assigned readings must demonstrate not only that you have completed the reading assignments, but that you have done so with time to reflect on the points that have emerged, to you, and the important concepts and approaches that you believe each book offers. You should be well positioned to discuss specific information you learned (facts and details), as well as the author/book's success in conveying the broader goals of the study. Be sure to consider each author's intent and approach, the structure s.he used to organize the chosen material, and the success of each book, including to what extent you evaluate the content and structure as achieving what the authors defined as their aims.

Each of us will have questions emerge in our minds throughout this class. Take note of those questions while you're reading, while you listen to presentations, as you participate in our walks, meditations, and field trips and commit to at least a short period of time each week to answering one of the questions in some detail. You can include these questions among your class, presentation and reading notes or you can keep a separate "journal" of your weekly questions, or simply gather sheets of loose paper together to make an informal "notebook". Part of our interest in this exercise is to find out "information", the answers to our questions, large and small as they may be. And part of our interest is to observe how and when our mind asks questions, and what stimulates that to occur. Aim to seek out an "answer" to one question each week that our class gathers. We will take opportunities

during class time to discuss our individual questions, and will have a more focused discuss of this exercise the week of our field trip to the Royal Botanical Gardens (October 30th).

**Principal Research Project**, Papers due no later than noon on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 35%

For your principal project for the semester will undertake in-depth research that results in both an oral presentation and written paper. For the oral component, you will present your research findings to the class for approximately 20 minutes, followed by no more than 10 minutes in which you will lead discussion and/or questions related to your research. The oral components will take place during the final four weeks of class: November 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, and December 4<sup>th</sup>; it will not be graded separately but assessed as part of the complete project output and understood as integral to the research process, and an opportunity for feedback while time remains to explore additional avenues.

For the paper component, you will submit an eight-to-ten-page paper (double-spaced), with a bibliography that is not included as part of your page count. As with other assignments in our course, you must use a recognized format (such as Chicago or APA) and apply it consistently to your bibliography.

The principal research project offers you an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of a topic that is of interest to you. We will discuss topic ideas in class to ensure that each of you is working on a different subject, and we will check in as a class at a few points in the semester to discuss how the projects are developing. The list below is not exhaustive but offers some ideas as to areas that you may wish to consider exploring for your project:

- the history of forestry in Canada
- the history of parks in Canada
- the history and ecology of a specific forest in Canada or in an international context such as Muir Woods (USA) or the Black Forest (Germany)
- the role(s) of trees for one or more indigenous groups in Canada and/or elsewhere in the world
- trees and colonialism: the dissemination of non-native trees in a global or geographically specific context
- philosophical references to trees
- musical references to trees, or trees and construction of instruments
- an individual who has promoted conservation initiatives (such as John Muir or Eliza Scidmore)
- landscape architecture and design
- the roles of trees for mental health and/or Shinrin-yoku
- intersections of trees and industrialization, economics and/or business, a particular industry such as pulp and paper, sawmills, logging or a specific company, its industrial or business history and impact
- medicinal perspectives on trees (potentially comparing different cultural contexts)
- trees and diseases
- fungi, lichen, moss

Nota Bene:

1. Any assignment or paper that is submitted late will be deducted one half letter grade per day.
2. Students are requested not to use laptops during class, except for presentations, if necessary.
3. The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of students to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes. Announcements will be made in class and by using the course email distribution list.
4. In the event of an absence, students should review and follow the Academic Regulations in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work.” Please consult the MSAF (McMaster Student Absence Form) statement on our website (<https://artsci.mcmaster.ca/forms-requests/>) and direct any questions or concerns to Shelley Anderson or Rebecca Bishop in the Arts & Science Program Office as appropriate.
5. Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or email [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca). For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.
6. You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences—e.g., the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty, please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>.  
The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: 1) Plagiarism—e.g., the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained. 2) Improper collaboration in group work. 3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.