

**Carleton University
Early Summer 2023
Department of English Language and Literature**

**ENGL 4115/5901: Culture and the Text
Leaves of Leaves: Plant Literacy and Literature
Prerequisites: fourth-year standing or permission of the department
Preclusions: N/A**

**Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30–2:30
Location: 1812 Dunton Tower and outdoors
Format: In person**

**Instructor: Robin Norris
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Office Hours: by appointment**

Course Description

Plants have been important throughout human history for reasons of both survival and culture. Although plants have been central to mythologies and folklore around the globe, today our personal awareness of plants is at an all-time low. This is an experiential learning course that combines fieldwork, experiential learning, and text-based discussion to develop plant literacy and increase awareness of the plant life in our environment while redefining our understanding of literacy. Writing assignments will emphasize reflection on the experiential learning aspects of the course and will include in-class writing and a plant journal. The intersecting goals of the course are to explore the concept of literacy while expanding our ability to perceive and engage with plants, as well as considering new methods of observation and understanding by challenging fixed notions of knowledge and being.

Learning Outcomes

Students will develop their understanding of the concepts of literacy and plant literacy.
Students will increase their plant literacy by learning to identify a number of plants that were previously unfamiliar to them.
Students will read and respond to fundamental literary texts and cultural concepts about plants.
Students will identify differences in how plants have been catalogued, categorized, written about, and engaged with in various cultural contexts.

Note: Fieldwork will take place outdoors during each meeting, rain or shine, so please dress and prepare accordingly.

Texts for purchase

You will need to procure two books: Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* and a field guide of your choice. *Braiding Sweetgrass* is widely available for purchase. It is also available as an e-book through MacOdrum Library, and the Ottawa Public Library has it as an e-book, audiobook, or hard copy. The field guide may include plants, trees, and/or wildflowers of Ontario. You should bring a hard copy of your field guide to class each week. Additional course readings and resources are available on Brightspace. In addition, you will need a notebook for use during fieldwork, as well as a journal for writing reflections in class.

Evaluation

A holistic assessment of the following will comprise the course mark, at 20% each. Students may request to meet one-on-one to discuss feedback on these assignments at any time.

- Leadership of one text discussion and supportive participation in peer-led discussion.
- Reflective writing. You will lead one reflective writing session and its accompanying discussion session. These discussions are your opportunity to share from your reflective writing.
- Leadership of one fieldwork experience. Fieldwork is your in-class opportunity to make notes in your handwritten plant journal.
- Final plant literacy exam. Takes place during class, open book using your handwritten plant journal, cumulative, may include short answer and/or essay questions.
- Attendance and participation. These criteria were discussed in class on May 9.

Communication about each absence is required. Do not come to class sick! We discussed an upper limit of say three absences in a hypothetical worst-case scenario situation.

Participation includes collaborative and collegial interactions within the classroom ecosystem. Preparation and engagement are always important but especially for peer-led activities. Students are encouraged to utilize self-awareness and self-care to stay on task and to use our time well.

Tentative Class Calendar

- Tues 5/9: Introductions. Our cultural literacies. Finish this course outline together.
- Thurs 5/11: Plant personal literacy narratives. Read plant *blindness texts for discussion.

		Texts for discussion	Reflective writing	Fieldwork
Tues 5/16	Read naming plants texts for discussion.	@blackforager (video)	Plant vocabulary	
Thurs 5/18		Planting Sweetgrass Interview with Albert Dumont (video)	Plants in your kitchen	
Tues 5/23		Tending Sweetgrass	Plants as signs and things	

		Onkwanóhkwá 'Our Medicines' (video)		
Thurs 5/25	Meet in Book Arts Lab to see Herbaria and plant-related materials from Archives and Special Collections.	Nine Herbs Charm	Reflections on experiential learning today	
Tues 5/30 <i>Collect and press your specimen at least two weeks prior to mounting. See video for instructions.</i>	Meet at CUAG for Slow Looking. Please read the chapter and/or listen to the podcast.	Article – Ingold?	Reflections on experiential learning today	
Thurs 6/1		Picking Sweetgrass	Plant poetry	
Tues 6/6		Joe Pitawanakwat (video)	Creative writing/response	
Thurs 6/8	Prepare for plant literacy exam.	Braiding Sweetgrass	Reflections on plant literacy one month later	
Tues 6/13	Meet at Book Arts Lab to mount your specimen.	Article – Brown? Diehm?	Reflections on experiential learning today	
Thurs 6/15		Burning Sweetgrass, Epilogue, and Notes	Closing reflection topic	Plant literacy exam

This course outline has been redesigned in consultation with Jeanette Jones through the Students as Partners Program (SAPP). Jeanette suggests the following questions for your consideration.

Braiding Sweetgrass, Part 1. Preface to pg. 59.

Focus Question(s): How many different perspectives and epistemological positions are represented in these first chapters? How does Kimmerer find ways to harmonize distinct ways of knowing?

Braiding Sweetgrass, Part 2. Pg. 61-117.

Focus Question(s): On pg. 112, Kimmerer asks us to imagine “speaking to the natural world as a member of the democracy of species.” What are some ways we might decentre the perspective of the human species? Is it possible to see the point of view of another species? A birch tree? A trout lily? A blade of grass? (**possibility of a creative project: imagined narrative of a plant?)

Braiding Sweetgrass, Part 3. Pg. 119-201.

Focus Question(s): On pg. 139, Kimmerer refers to the possibility of a “polyculture of complementary knowledges.” She animates her scientific knowledge of botany with a sensual knowledge acquired through contact. (How) Does this winding of the cerebral and the sensory influence your perspective?

Braiding Sweetgrass, Part 4. Pg. 203-300.

Focus Question(s): On page 261, Kimmerer writes: “Losing a plant can threaten a culture in much the same way as losing a language.” What roles do plants play in the cultures of your family or community? Are they significant for their culinary or medicinal uses? Spiritual? Romantic? Emblematic? How do plants animate human culture?

Braiding Sweetgrass, Part 5. Pg. 301-386.

Focus Question(s): One of the central themes of *Braiding Sweetgrass* is reciprocity. On 319 she writes that “in return for the gifts of Mother Earth, human people have responsibility for caring for the nonhuman people.” What are some ways we as individuals can practice reciprocity or conceive of mutuality with the nonhuman beings in our environment? Is it possible to build relationships with plants?

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Statement on Plagiarism

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” According to the Department examples of plagiarism include the following:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. It is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of

work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire course, or suspension from a program. For more information please go to: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

Special Information Regarding Pandemic Measures

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow COVID-19 prevention measures and all mandatory public health requirements (e.g. wearing a mask, physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory and cough etiquette) and [mandatory self-screening](#) prior to coming to campus daily.

If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately, self-isolate, and complete the mandatory [symptom reporting tool](#). For purposes of contact tracing, attendance will be recorded in all classes and labs. Participants can check in using posted QR codes through the cuScreen platform where provided. Students who do not have a smartphone will be required to complete a paper process as indicated on the [COVID-19 website](#).

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow guidelines regarding safe movement and seating on campus (e.g. directional arrows, designated entrances and exits, designated seats that maintain physical distancing). In order to avoid congestion, allow all previous occupants to fully vacate a classroom before entering. No food or drinks are permitted in any classrooms or labs.

For the most recent information about Carleton's COVID-19 response and required measures, please see the [University's COVID-19 webpage](#) and review the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact covidinfo@carleton.ca

Please note that failure to comply with University policies and mandatory public health requirements, and endangering the safety of others are considered misconduct under the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#). Failure to comply with Carleton's COVID-19 procedures may lead to supplementary action involving Campus Safety and/or Student Affairs.

Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the [Pregnancy Accommodation Form](#).

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>