

“The Poetry of Trees”
Course Syllabus
Chautauqua Institution, NY 2019

Instructor: Shannon Sullivan, BA & CSD
Course length: 4 days

Day One:

Introduction of myself – sharing my background with the students

Student introduction – share about themselves and why they registered for the class

Lecture – I will lecture both on the importance of meditation and breath work when connecting with nature in order to write.

I will speak on trees specifically and how they are part of the earth and how their lives are intertwined with ours as well as what trees have to teach us to be better people to nature as well as to ourselves and our communities.

I will share with students about how other poets have written about trees and how it inspired their writing

Guided Meditation – I will lead a 20 minute guided meditation based around the theme of trees

Journaling - Students will do a 10 minute journaling exercise

Poetry Exercise - Students will do a free form poetry writing exercise based upon the book, Writing begins with the breath by Larain Herring.

Assignment – Students will receive a brief assignment to do which will be incorporated into the next class.

Day Two:

Checking in – Students will share based around the assignment from the day before

Lecture – I will lead a short lecture sharing more about how trees are viewed through many of the Indigenous cultures locally, the United States and abroad.

Yoga Meditation – I will lead an easy, beginning yoga meditation that allows students to become centered with the trees they will be writing about for the day.

Journaling – Students will do a short journal exercise to see which tree wants to connect with each of them for the next poetry writing exercise.

Poetry Writing Exercise – Students will use the shape of trees, leaves, branches, bark, roots, trunk, to shape their poetry about a tree of their choice.

Sharing – Students will have the opportunity to share with each other about their process and experience.

Day Three:

Checking in - Students to share their observations from the day before

Lecture - I will share with students examples of different poems about trees written by famous poets throughout the human history.

Walking Meditation - Based on the Buddhist practice of breathing and walking meditation, I will lead the students in a short practice to get centered for the class.

Poetry Writing Exercise – Students will use a poetry writing prompt developed by Ron Harton called “Nature Writing” which has students work on connecting with trees directly while crafting poetry about the trees. I will walk the students through the exercise and then have them develop their own style.

Sharing - We will come back as a group and share our experiences together.

Assignment – Over the next day have students think about which poem they have written over the past three days to develop further through editing the last day of class.

Day Four:

Checking in - Check in with students about how they chose the poem they want to work on for the last class to do details, developing and editing.

Silent Meditation - I will move students into a silent meditation for the last class in which they connect and ground themselves with the trees on the Chautauqua campus.

Developing/Editing - We will spend the time in class with one specific poem the students have written in the previous three days and have them first develop the imagery of the poem through language and words. Then we will move into editing where we look at sentence structure and details to bring out the ideas in the poem.

Sharing – Each student will share one completed/edited poem with each other for the close of the class.

Thank you, Sharing contact information and Survey