



# Ecofiction & Prose

by Mary Woodbury

Ecocity themes—  
Socio-cultural: healthy culture

Subject: Ecofiction and  
Prose

Presenter: Mary  
Woodbury

Brief introduction into  
Mary's background and  
ongoing studies.

# Introduction

# Introductory Thoughts

What unites people? Armies? Gold? Flags? Stories. There's nothing in the world more powerful than a good story. Nothing can stop it. No enemy can defeat it. –Tyrion Lannister, *Game of Thrones* (S8, E6)



# Similar Genres

Ecofiction stands for ecologically oriented fiction, and I use the term in my studies because it's very well formulated by scholars and is comprehensive. Check below for other specific terms covering ecological themes in fiction. There are many more than this, such as fungoid fiction.

- Environmental fiction
- Afrofuturism
- Green fiction
- Nature writing
- Ecological weird fiction
- Environmental science fiction
- Climate fiction
- Solarpunk, biopunk, ecopunk
- Anthropocene fiction
- Sea stories

# What is Ecofiction?

## *Some Easy Answers*

Stories set in fictional landscapes that capture the essence of natural ecosystems. –Mike Vasey

Fiction that deals with environmental issues or the relation between humanity and the physical environment. –Jim Dwyer

A component of two related literary phenomena: nature-oriented literature and environmental literature. –Patrick D. Murphy

A way to intersect natural landscape, environmental issues, and usually human connection, into any genre and make it come alive. –Mary Woodbury

Fiction with a conscience. –John Yunker

An elastic term, capacious enough to accommodate a variety of fictional works that address the relationship between natural settings and the human communities that dwell within them. –[Cambridge](#)

# Ecofiction Characteristics and Traits



Is diverse in emotional outcomes: can be weird, hopeful, joyful, scary, disastrous, and so on



Can take place in the past, present, or future



Can be a novel genre on its own or a composite subgenre; when a composite subgenre, it may take place in other genre and literary fictions



Is evolving along with our natural history and newest ecological and climate crises; ecofiction does not deny science



May have common environmental topics such as droughts, floods, wildlife, extinction, and place-based issues and common human topics such as cultural diaspora, refugee crises, love, politics, mystery, and survival



Can take place anywhere in the world and represents cultural and environmental diversity

# History of Ecofiction



Originally evolved with the study of natural history, along with ecocriticism; became popular in the 1970s, though earlier works predated the term



The anthology *Eco-fiction*, edited by John Stadler and written by major science fiction authors, was published by Washington Square Press in April 1971



Jim Dwyer's academic and reading studies lead to *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction*, University of Nevada Press in April 2010



The field is evolving thanks to modern media and academic groups (Dragonfly.eco, Cambridge Ecofiction Group, New York Times, ASLE, etc.)

# Healthy Impacts of Fiction & Prose on Culture



Reading can reduce stress, help us sleep better, and increase vocabulary



Fiction and prose can foster more empathy for others, including for plants and animals, and can guide the reader to other world views



Science fiction and prose can provide real futuristic warnings and inspire technology



Symbolism, a tool used in fiction, helps create impact by enhancing dry facts and figures



Fiction and prose entertain but also inform, widening knowledge of our natural world but usually without being didactic or preachy



# Discussion (10-15 minutes)



Name a fictional story that had a positive impact on you.



How might a popular story impact your local community?



Can you think of a fictional story that caused positive change in the world?



What kinds of stories do you think the world needs today?



Name an author whose stories seem to positively impact society?

# Historical Examples (Up to 2000)

Moby-Dick, Herman Melville (1851)

The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck (1939)

The Giving Tree, Shel Silverstein (1964)

Hainish Cycle Series, Ursula K. Le Guin (1984)

Turtle Island, Gary Snyder (1974)

Ecotopia, Ernest Callenbach (1990)

The Parable series, Octavia Butler (1993-1998)

Wolf Totem, Jiang Rong (2000)

# Modern Examples (2000 and Beyond)

The Man with Compound Eyes, Wu Ming-Yi (2013)

Flight Behavior, Barbara Kingsolver (2006)

Gun Island, Amitav Ghosh (2019)

The Overstory, Richard Powers (2019)

The Lamentations of Zeno, Ilija Trojanow (2016)

Oil on Water, Helon Habila (2016)

Bangkok Wakes to Rain, Pitchaya Sudbanthad  
(2019)

Where the River Runs Gold, Sita Brahmachari  
(2019)

# Canadian Examples

Oryx and Crake Trilogy, Margaret Atwood (2004+)

Once in Blockadia, Stephen Collis (2016)

The Mercy Journals, Claudia Capser (2016)

The Wild in You, Lorna Crozier (2015)

The Morrow Thieves, Cherie Dimaline (2017)

Hawk, Jennifer Dance (2016)

No Entry, Gila Green (2019)

Monkey Beach, Eden Robinson (1995)

# Brief Excerpts - Reading

JEFF VANDERMEER'S *BORNE*

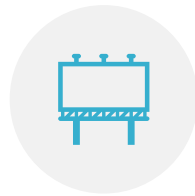
LORNA CROZIER'S *THE WILD IN YOU* (PROSE)

MICHAEL BERNANOS' *THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN*

# Writing in Brief



We're not out to test your writing skills today, just to brainstorm and practice!



Story idea: what, why, and when? Character: who? Environment: where?



Outlines. Events and transitions: plot, evolution, pacing, etc.



Points of view: First person (you), second person (someone is telling you), or third person (outside narration)



Stylistic considerations: imagery, conflict, metaphor, tone, voice, economy of words, etc.



Engage the reader from start to end. Read. Write. Read more.

# Nature Writing in Fiction: Tips



Don't be preachy; story impact is greater than author intent



Take your notebook or laptop and write outside for inspiration



Write something you know well



Or research your subject and get super imaginative



Go for a run or hike to gather inspiration



Learn something new about anything: a dragonfly, a cedar, a black bear



Practice writing about a simple object like a pinecone





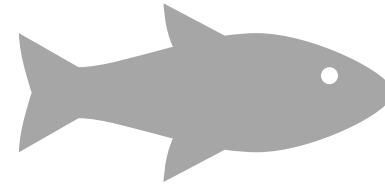
# Writing Exercise Part I – 10 minutes

Brainstorming: Write a sentence or two or three about this photo. What you write should be set in a fictional scenario.





Pass the idea on paper to Mary. No need to add your name unless you want it back.



P.S. That photo was taken last winter at BCIT's Burnaby campus near Guichon Creek!

Think of an idea for an environmental story or poem that could be set in or near Vancouver. Write down your idea (one to two sentences) and include in your brief writing how a story about this idea might have an impact on local culture (another one or two sentences).

## Writing Exercise Part 2 – 15 Minutes

Write an engaging first sentence to your story or poem idea from the exercise in part 2. As you write, consider where this piece might go and how you might organize it in the future. Turn it into Mary. No need to add your name unless you would like your entry back.

## Writing Exercise Part 3 – 12 minutes

Mary will draw random entries of all three exercises if time allows. If there's time, we can discuss some of the entries.

Reading  
Exercise  
Entries – 15  
Minutes

# Digital “Handouts”



See [Dragonfly.eco](http://Dragonfly.eco) for slides and references

Email contact: [editor@dragonfly.eco](mailto:editor@dragonfly.eco)

# References

## Ecofiction Web Projects

- [Dragonfly.eco](#)
- [Research Projects at ASLE](#)
- [Cambridge Ecofiction Bookgroup](#)
- [Empirical Ecocriticism](#)

## Web Articles – Impact of Fiction

- Baishi, Avni; Slade, Martin D., Levy, Becca R. "[A chapter a day: Association of book reading with longevity.](#)" *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 164, 2016.
- Beres, Derek. "[Why reading fiction is as important now as ever.](#)" Big Think, 2018.
- Chiles, Andy. "[Reading can help reduce stress, according to University of Sussex research.](#)" Study author: Lewis, David. *The Argus*, 2009.
- Gow, Kailin. "[How fiction impacts fact: The social impact of books.](#)" *Compass*, 2012.
- Longhi, Lorraine. "[Science fiction: Shaping the future.](#)" Arizona State University, 2014.
- Parker, Holly. "[The real-life benefits of reading fiction.](#)" *Psychology Today*, 2018.

- Wiehardt, Ginny. "[Symbolism in Fiction Writing.](#)" *The Balance Careers*, 2019.

## Ecofiction Books and Journals

- Dwyer, Jim. *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction*. University Press, 2010.
- See [Ecolitbooks.com](#) for a large list of journals and references.

## General Writing Guides

- [Purdue Writing Lab](#)
- [Literary Devices](#)

## Image Reference

- [Game of Thrones image: By Source \(WP:NFC#4\), Fair use](#)

# Q&A

Brief question and answer period.

