Rewilding Our Story: Using Storytelling to Combat Climate Change

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SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH and PRACTICE SEMINAR

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Rewilding Our Story:
Using Storytelling to Combat Climate Change

Wednesday, 12:00 to 12:50 pm in person (255 A/B Sykes Student Union)
and in our Zoom room: https://wcupa.zoom.us/j/92058580576, passcode: 711670
Rewilding Our Story: Using Storytelling to Combat Climate Change
Susquehanna University Honors Project
Calli Lambard
“We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live”

Joan Didion
Today’s Storyline

1. RESEARCH: The Importance of Stories
2. PRACTICE: Rewilding Our Story
3. READING: “The Cycle” by Abby Pursh
The Spark

- Connection to my two degrees
- Climate communication
- Sustainability book club
Importance of Story

- Stories in childhood help children “make sense of the world, foster imagination, focus, learn better communication," learn sequence and consequence
- Create an emotional connection
- Create a community by “relaying shared beliefs, values, and norms.”
- Part of our identity: “our identities are constructed through narrative”
Books I Analyzed

When global climate change and economic crises lead to social chaos in the early 2020s, California becomes full of dangers, from pervasive water shortage to masses of vagabonds who will do anything to live to see another day. Fifteen-year-old Lauren Olamina lives inside a gated community with her preacher father, family, and neighbors, sheltered from the surrounding anarchy. In a society where any vulnerability is a risk, she suffers from hyperempathy, a debilitating sensitivity to others' emotions. Precocious and clear-eyed, Lauren must make her voice heard in order to protect her loved ones from the imminent disasters her small community stubbornly ignores. But what begins as a fight for survival soon leads to something much more: the birth of a new faith... and a startling vision of human destiny.

The Overstory, winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction, is a sweeping, impassioned work of activism and resistance that is also a stunning evocation of—and paean to—the natural world. From the roots to the crown and back to the seeds, Richard Powers's twelfth novel unfolds in concentric rings of interlocking fables that range from antebellum New York to the late twentieth-century Timber Wars of the Pacific Northwest and beyond. There is a world alongside ours—vast, slow, interconnected, resourceful, magnificently inventive, and almost invisible to us. This is the story of a handful of people who learn how to see that world and who are drawn up into its unfolding catastrophe.

A dealer of rare books, Deen is used to a quiet life spent indoors, but as his once-solid beliefs begin to shift, he is forced to set out on an extraordinary journey; one that takes him from Kolkata to Los Angeles. His path is a tangled force through the memories and experiences of those he meets along the way. There is Piya, a fellow Bengali-American who sets his journey in motion; Rafi, an entrepreneurial young man who opens Deen's eyes to the realities of growing up in today's world; Tipu, with his desperate attempt to help someone in need; and Cinta, an old friend who provides the missing link in the story they are all a part of. It is a journey that will upend everything he thought he knew about himself, about the Bengali legends of his childhood, and about the world around him.

Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island is a beautifully realized novel that effortlessly spans space and time. It is the story of a man whose faith in the world and the future is restored by two remarkable women.

The special mystery and beauty of the sea is the setting for Rachel Carson’s memorable portrait of the sea birds and sea creatures that inhabit the eastern coasts of North America. In a sequence of riveting adventures along the shore, within the open sea, and down in the twilight depths, Rachel Carson introduces us to the winds and currents of the ocean as revealed in the lives of Scomber, the mackerel, and Anguilla, the eel. Life for them a continuous miracle, a series of life-and-death victories played out among strange and often terrifying life forms far below the surface of the sea.
4 Characteristics of Good Environmental Writing
Four characteristics of good environmental writing

1. Teaches something to the reader about environmental issues or the environment
2. Makes science easy to understand
3. Puts the reader in the moment, giving an emotional connection or showing the stakes
4. Shows us environmental destruction that is not often seen
Teaches something to the reader about environmental issues or the environment

- Parable of the Sower
  - Mutual aid in environmental disasters
  - Passing on knowledge
  - “Tools” for climate change

- Under the Sea Wind
  - Understanding the ocean → caring for it
Makes science easy to understand

• Under the Sea Wind
  • Scientific jargon and poetic language are not mutually exclusive
  • “I am that comparatively rare phenomenon, a scientist who is also a writer.”

• The Overstory
  • Playing with language (standing in court and in the forest)
  • “thesis book, though hardly didactic.”
Puts the reader in the moment

- **Gun Island**
  - “humans can’t experience climate change itself, just individual outcomes.”
  - Individual characters’ experiences
- **Under the Sea Wind**
  - Centering the perspective of the animals
  - Originally considered “too poetic for a work of nonfiction.”
Shows us environmental destruction that is not often seen

- Rob Nixon’s “slow violence”
  - “neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental”
- Gun Island
  - “the extreme weather events of the Anthropocene may seem implausible in a realist context...but now ‘these events are neither surreal nor magical.’”
  - “a book about reality.”
How can we put this into practice?
1. Essays by me on my research
2. Creative Nonfiction and Fiction from Susquehanna University Community
3. Tie it all together
How I chose stories

• Timothy Morton argues that “a truly ecological reading practice would think about the environment beyond rigid conceptual categories”
• Environment not always at the forefront of the story
• We can read stories and consider the environmental context
Read our work!

rewildingourstory.wordpress.com

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