

# LIT 4331: Envisioning Environmental Disaster in Children's Literature

**Instructor Name:** Brianna Anderson

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**Synchronous Zoom Class Meeting Times:** Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during Period 3 (9:35 am to 10:25 am)

**Class Zoom Link:** <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/5889622261>

**Office Location and Hours:** Fridays from 11 am to noon on Zoom.

<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/92243370399?pwd=a3BYbWRUNmdRcnBjZzJRC1NzdnUxUT09>.

If you would like to meet with me but cannot make it to my office hours, please send me an email with your availability and we will arrange a meeting time.

**Course website:** Canvas



February 15, 2019: Protestors with banners at a Youth Strike for Climate march in London

“Adults keep saying we owe it to the young people to give them hope, but I don’t want your hope. **I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic.** I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is”

- Teen climate activist Greta Thunberg, 2019 World Economic Forum

## COURSE OVERVIEW

As the global climate emergency accelerates in the twenty-first century, it has become increasingly evident that environmental disasters and extreme weather will disrupt the lives of

many of today's children. In response to this developing crisis, environmental children's literature has proliferated in the last twenty years as creators seek to educate young readers about the natural world and promote youth eco-activism. This course will examine how contemporary children's literature from a range of genres and mediums invite readers to grapple with complex environmental issues, such as habitat destruction, plastic pollution, and overfishing. Throughout the semester, our inquiries will center on three pressing questions: How do the formal and narrative properties of comics, novels, picture books, and other media shape how these texts represent abstract and unsettling environmental problems? How do these texts and their paratexts empower (or, in some cases, disempower) children to enact meaningful environmental change? And, finally, how can environmental children's literature motivate action and convey urgency without inducing feelings of overwhelming anxiety or despair in young readers?

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this class will be held entirely online over Zoom. I am aware of the fact that COVID-19 continues to impact our daily lives. Thus, if you are experiencing any hardships because of the virus, please contact me as soon as possible so that we may make any necessary arrangements contingent on your circumstances.

### REQUIRED MATERIALS

You should acquire the following texts for the class. Texts are listed alphabetically, not in reading order. Additional short readings will be supplied by the instructor in Canvas.

- *Aquicorn Cove* – Katie O'Neill
- \*\* *The Carbon Diaries* – Saci Lloyd
- \*\* *Hoot* – Carl Hiaasen
- \*\* *I Survived the Attack of the Grizzlies, 1967* – Lauren Tarshis
- *I'm Not a Plastic Bag* – Rachel Hope Allison
- \*\* *The Last Kids on Earth, Book 1* – Max Brallier
- \*\* *The Marrow Thieves* – Cherie Dimaline
- \*\* *Mayah's Lot* – Rebecca Bratspies and Charlie LaGreca
- *The Underfoot, Vol. 1* – Ben Fisher and Emily S. Whitten
- *The Water Princess* – Susan Verde, Georgie Badiel, and Peter H. Reynolds
- *We Are Water Protectors* – Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade
- \*\* *Wilder Girls* – Rory Power
- \*\* *World Without Fish: How Kids Can Help Save the Oceans* – Mark Kurlansky

\*\* A PDF version of these texts will be supplied by the instructor in Canvas. However, if you find that you focus better when reading physical texts, I encourage you to buy or borrow hard copies.

### GRADE DISTRIBUTION

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Active Participation                     | 10% |
| Discussion Board Posts (8) and Responses | 20% |
| Class Discussion Leadership              | 10% |

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Creative Image/Text Project | 20% |
| Critical Analysis Paper     | 20% |
| Syllabus Design Proposal    | 20% |

## ASSIGNMENTS

**Active Participation:** In a Zoom class, participation takes many forms, including speaking during class discussions, commenting in the Zoom chat, contributing to group activities, writing responses in shared Google docs, asking questions, and responding to your peers' presentations and projects. While I will occasionally give short lectures, most class sessions will be devoted to small- and whole-class conversation. You should come to class having read all of the assigned materials and ready to offer your insights, questions, and thoughts with others. Consistent, thoughtful participation earns an A.

Please resist the urge to multitask during class. While it may seem harmless to check your email or send a quick text (after all, you have your computer screen open right in front of you!), these small actions prevent you from fully engaging in discussion and harm your overall participation in the course. Stay focused, take notes, and, if the temptation is too strong, mute your notifications during class.

I strongly suggest that you turn your webcam on as much as possible and keep your audio muted unless you are speaking. In my experience, students who turn their webcams on tend to be more fully engaged in the class and participate more often. Additionally, having your webcam on helps other people! It allows people who have hearing impairments to read your lips, it reduces the chance that your tone will be misinterpreted by others, and it helps me know if everyone understands what we are discussing or if the class needs additional clarification. Obviously, if you need to mute your video for a bit, that's fine, as long as you are still participating.

**Discussion Board Posts and Responses:** You are responsible for completing **8** out of 13 possible discussion board posts (1 per week). These posts will help you prepare for class and supplement our discussions. I will provide a handful of prompts each week, but you are also free to respond to any elements of our assigned texts that you find particularly engaging, provocative, or troubling. For instance, you could analyze a passage or sequence of images, draw connections between texts, discuss a plot point or theme, examine the paratext, or link the secondary articles to our assigned texts or texts from outside this class. Posts should be about 200 words long and carefully proofread, though they do not need to be as formally written as an essay.

Additionally, you should thoughtfully respond to your peers' posts at least **4** times this semester. Responses should be about a paragraph long and generative in nature. In other words, you should not merely say "I agree!" or "Great point!" Instead you should build on the posts of others, extend their analysis, point out additional examples, provide contradictory arguments, etc.

\*\*\* Discussion board posts and responses are **due in Canvas by 6 pm every Tuesday** so that I can have time to read them before we meet Wednesday morning.

**Class Discussion Leadership:** With a partner, you will develop a short presentation (**7 to 10 minutes long**) about one aspect of your assigned text. Presentations may provide historical or scientific information about an environmental issue explored in the text; analyze one theme or motif in the text; perform a close reading of a specific scene, passage, or image(s); or synthesize and draw connections to a relevant secondary article not included on the syllabus. Presentations may take the form of a short paper read to the class, a more informal presentation with visuals (such as a Powerpoint), or a prerecorded video, and they should end with **2 to 4 solid discussion questions for the class**. These presentations will serve as a springboard for class discussions and the discussion board posts.

During the week preceding their presentation, students will meet or email with the instructor and the other student(s) presenting on their chosen text to discuss their topic and questions.

**Creative Image/Text Project:** Throughout the semester, we will carefully analyze how the relationship between images and texts in comics, illustrated novels, picture books, and other media allows creators to convey environmental messages to young readers. For this assignment, you will build on the image/text principles we have examined in class by creating your own comic, picture book, or zine about the environmental issue of your choice. Image/Text projects may be created using digital or physical tools or a combination of the two; they may be fictional or nonfictional but should be informed by at least some secondary research into the chosen environmental issue; and they should be at least 12 pages long. Your final submission should include a properly formatted Works Cited page. Additional resources will be provided in class.

**Critical Analysis Paper:** This assignment should be 5 to 7 doubled-spaced pages long and may take one of the following forms:

Analysis of a Specific Text: For this more traditional, open-topic paper, you will analyze one or two environmental children's literature texts. Your chosen text(s) may be included on our syllabus or from outside of class; however, if you choose to examine a text that we have read together, your analysis should go beyond our class discussion, rather than merely rehashing previous responses.

Analysis of a Medium or Genre: You will examine how a particular medium (comics, picture books, poetry, etc.) or genre (dystopian, eco-horror, fantasy, etc.) can convey environmental knowledge to young readers. While you should cite examples from specific texts to support your argument, your focus should be on the particular affordances and constraints of the medium or genre itself. For instance, how can the panel structure of comics or the structure of a poem on the page represent abstract environmental issues? How does eco-horror use horror tropes to impact the reader emotionally and motivate them to take action? What rhetorical effects does the fantasy genre use to teach readers about the environment? What are the limits of using picture books to teach children about climate change and other large-scale environmental problems?

For both options, you should conduct secondary research to strengthen your analyses. Papers should include MLA formatted in-text citations and a Works Cited page. Critical Analysis papers may build on discussion board posts.

**Syllabus Design Proposal:** While not all English majors will ever teach in a formal classroom environment, you will undoubtedly have many future opportunities to informally educate your family, friends, coworkers, Internet strangers, and others about the environment. Thus, for our final assignment, you will propose a “syllabus unit” that you could use to teach others about an environmental issue or ecocritical approach—whether in the classroom, as part of an afterschool program, or simply as a recommended reading list.

Your written proposal should be 3 to 4 double-spaced pages long. You will generate a list of at least 4 primary children’s literature texts on your chosen issue, along with at least two complementary secondary sources. Your proposal should address some of the following questions: How do your chosen readings provide diverse viewpoints about your topic? How do your texts build on, contradict, or complicate each other? What discussions would you expect your texts to generate? What gaps or silences did you discover while researching these texts? (For instance, if you can’t find any Hispanic children’s texts on air pollution, why might that be?) How reliable is the environmental information presented in your texts? What potential final project could students create after reading these texts?

### GRADING SCALE

|    |         |  |    |        |  |    |        |
|----|---------|--|----|--------|--|----|--------|
| A  | 93-100% |  | B- | 80-82% |  | D+ | 67-69% |
| A- | 90-92%  |  | C+ | 77-79% |  | D  | 63-66% |
| B+ | 87-89%  |  | C  | 73-76% |  | D- | 60-62% |
| B  | 83-86%  |  | C- | 70-72% |  | E  | 0-59%  |

### GRADING RUBRIC

**A-Level Assignments** demonstrate a thoughtful, critical, engaging, and creative interpretation of the text. They present complex, original arguments that are fully supported with evidence and skillfully draw on outside sources. They use clear scholarly prose and have strong organization to ensure that the reader can easily follow the overall argument.

**B-Level Assignments** are competent papers that are competently organized, well-developed, and relatively free of errors, but they may be somewhat less critical or original than an A-level assignment. While the argument is generally logical, it may have gaps in thoroughness or lack focus. Secondary sources may not be as skillfully incorporated as A-level assignments, and the chosen supporting evidence may not help further the author’s own argument.

Both A-level and B-level assignments will contain proper MLA citations and formatting with few to no errors, and they will be carefully proofread to avoid recurrent grammatical errors.

Assignments that score lower than an A or B generally have larger problems with development, incorporation of outside research, structure, and grammar. While they may competently summarize a text and point out themes, they lack strong, coherent, and original arguments.

## COURSE POLICIES

**Attendance:** This class is heavily discussion-based, so attendance during our synchronous Zoom sessions is mandatory. You are allowed to miss two classes without explanation. Each unexcused absence after two will lower your final grade by 3%. Students who accrue six unexcused absences will fail the course.

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this class are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

**Tardiness:** I may take attendance at the beginning or end of class. Latecomers (more than 5 minutes tardy) receive partial absences and must see me after class so that I know you attended.

**Late Papers/Assignments:** Assignments that are submitted late will lose ten percent off their final grade for each day that they are late. After three days, I will not accept late assignments. Discussion posts may not be submitted late.

Generally, I am quite flexible about granting short (1 to 3 day) extensions with no grade penalties, particularly for students who have consistently submitted previous work on time or who are dealing with challenging external circumstances, illness, etc. **However, I will only grant extensions if you request one BEFORE the assignment deadline.** If you submit an assignment late with no explanation and without my pre-approval, you will be subject to the grade penalties outlined above.

**Classroom Behavior:** Classroom discussion should be civil and respectful to everyone and relevant to the topic we are discussing. The issues that we are discussing are controversial and have no easy solutions, and everyone is entitled to their opinion. While you are certainly allowed to disagree with each other and (the instructor!), you should present your viewpoint in a polite and constructive manner. I will not tolerate any rude, coarse, or offensive remarks based upon race, gender, ability, or sexual identity, in written assignments or in class discussion. Dismissive, rude behavior will result in dismissal from class.

**Paper Format & Submission:** All papers should be formatted per MLA 8<sup>th</sup> edition standards (TNR 12, double-spaced, one-inch margins, MLA header, and MLA citations) and submitted to the assignment on Canvas as a .doc or .docx file. **Please note that failure of technology is not an excuse for missing or late assignments, so plan your time accordingly.**

**Paper Maintenance Responsibilities:** Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.

**Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism:** UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: ‘On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing

this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions.>

Plagiarism can occur even without any malicious intent to deceive if you fail to understand and employ proper documentation techniques. When in doubt, ask for help!

**Students with disabilities** who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://disability.ufl.edu/>), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor early in the semester.

**Wellness/Counseling:** Students who are in distress or who are in need of counseling or urgent help: please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to you. UF’s Counseling and Wellness Center offers additional support: 352-392-1575, or contact them online: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>

**UF’s Policy on Sexual Harassment:** The University of Florida is committed to providing a safe educational, working, and residential environment that is free from sexual harassment or misconduct directed towards any and all members of the community:  
<https://titleix.ufl.edu/about/title-ix-rights/>

**Grading Policies:** For information on UF Grading policies, see:  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

**Grade Appeals:** In 4000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade with Dr. Kenneth Kidd, the Undergraduate Advisor of the English department ([kbkidd@ufl.edu](mailto:kbkidd@ufl.edu)). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

**Course Evaluations.** Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Unless otherwise specified, please read the full assigned text before the first class that we discuss it.

Note: Readings and assignments are subject to change. Pay attention to Canvas and announcements in class.

| READINGS AND DUE DATES                      |   |
|---|---|
| Week 1: Historicizing Children’s Literature |   |
| Monday<br>1/11                              | Introductions and Course Overview   |
| Wednesday<br>1/13                           | Peter Hunt - “Children’s Literature” Keyword Essay (Canvas)<br><br>Peter Hollindale - “Nature” Keyword Essay (Canvas) |

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| Friday 1/15                       | Carolyn Sigler - "Wonderland to Wasteland: Toward Historicizing Environmental Activism in Children's Literature" (Canvas)<br><br><b>Sign up for Class Discussion Co-Leadership slots</b> |
| <b>Unit 1: Youth Eco-Warriors</b> |  |
| <b>Week 2</b>                     |  |
| Monday 1/18                       | <b>No class – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</b>  |
| Wednesday 1/20                    | Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goad - <i>We Are Water Protectors</i><br><br>Perry Nodelman - "Decoding the Images: How Picture Books Work" (Canvas)                                       |
| Friday 1/22                       | Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goad - <i>We Are Water Protectors</i><br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____   |
| <b>Week 3</b>                     |  |
| Monday 1/25                       | Carl Hiaasen - <i>Hoot</i> (Chapters 1 through 9) (Canvas)<br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____  |
| Wednesday 1/27                    | Carl Hiaasen - <i>Hoot</i> (Chapters 10 through 16) (Canvas)<br><br>Aitchison, "Little Saboteurs, Puerile Politics" (Canvas)   |
| Friday 1/29                       | Carl Hiaasen - <i>Hoot</i> (Chapters 17 to end) (Canvas)   |
| <b>Week 4</b>                     |  |
| Monday 2/1                        | Rebecca Bratspies and Charlie LaGreca - <i>Mayah's Lot</i> (Canvas)<br><br>Giovanna Di Chiro - "Environmental Justice" Keyword Essay (Canvas)<br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____ |
| Wednesday 2/3                     | Rebecca Bratspies and Charlie LaGreca - <i>Mayah's Lot</i> (Canvas)<br><br><a href="#">Ashley Fetters - "Where is the Black Blueberries for Sal?"</a>                                    |
| Friday 2/5                        | Susan Verde, Georgie Badiel, and Peter H. Reynolds - <i>The Water Princess</i>   |



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|                                     | Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____   |
| <b>Unit 2: Our Imperiled Oceans</b> |   |
| <b>Week 5</b>                       |   |
| Monday 2/8                          | Katie O’Neill – <i>Aquicorn Cove</i><br><br>Discussion Co-Leaders: _____ and _____  |
| Wednesday 2/10                      | Katie O’Neill – <i>Aquicorn Cove</i><br><br>Greta Gaard – “Ecofeminism” Keyword Essay (Canvas)  |
| Friday 2/12                         | Katie O’Neill – <i>Aquicorn Cove</i>  |
| <b>Week 6</b>                       |   |
| Monday 2/15                         | Mark Kurlansky – <i>World Without Fish: How Kids Can Help Save the Oceans</i> (Canvas)<br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____   |
| Wednesday 2/17                      | Mark Kurlansky – <i>World Without Fish: How Kids Can Help Save the Oceans</i> (Canvas)  |
| Friday 2/19                         | <b>Peer Review Workshop: Bring a draft of your Creative Image/Text Project to class to share.</b>   |
| <b>Week 7</b>                       |   |
| Monday 2/22                         | Rachel Hope Allison – <i>I’m Not a Plastic Bag</i><br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____   |
| Wednesday 2/24                      | Rachel Hope Allison – <i>I’m Not a Plastic Bag</i><br><br>Clare Echterling - “How to Save the World and Other Lessons from Children’s Environmental Literature” (Canvas)<br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____ |

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| Friday 2/26                                   | Rachel Hope Allison – <i>I’m Not a Plastic Bag</i><br><b>Due: Creative Image/Text Project</b>  |
| <b>Unit 3: Hostile Nature and Eco-Anxiety</b> |  |
| <b>Week 8</b>                                 |  |
| Monday 3/1                                    | Lauren Tarshis – <i>I Survived the Attack of the Grizzlies, 1967</i> (Canvas)<br>Discussion Co-Leaders: _____ and _____  |
| Wednesday 3/3                                 | Lauren Tarshis – <i>I Survived the Attack of the Grizzlies, 1967</i> (Canvas)<br><a href="#">Alex Morris - “Children of the Climate Crisis”</a>  |
| Friday 3/5                                    | Lauren Tarshis – <i>I Survived the Attack of the Grizzlies, 1967</i> (Canvas)  |
| <b>Week 9</b>                                 |  |
| Monday 3/8                                    | Rory Power – <i>Wilder Girls</i> (Chapters 1 through 9) (Canvas)<br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____  |
| Wednesday 3/10                                | Rory Power – <i>Wilder Girls</i> (Chapters 10 through 20) (Canvas)<br>Maria Karen – <a href="#">“Eco-Horror: Energy Crises, Pollution, &amp; the End of Humanity”</a><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____   |
| Friday 3/12                                   | Rory Power – <i>Wilder Girls</i> (Chapters 21 to end) (Canvas)   |
| <b>Week 10</b>                                |  |
| Monday 3/15                                   | Saci Lloyd – <i>The Carbon Diaries</i> (“January” through “April”) (Canvas)<br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____   |
| Wednesday 3/17                                | Saci Lloyd – <i>The Carbon Diaries</i> (“May” through “August”) (Canvas)<br>Elizabeth Braithwaite – ““The Hope – the One Hope – is that Your Generation Will Prove Wiser and More Responsible than Mine:” Constructions of Guilt in a Selection of Disaster Texts for Young Adults” (Canvas) |
| Friday 3/19                                   | Saci Lloyd – <i>The Carbon Diaries</i> (“September” to end) (Canvas)   |

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| <b>Week 11</b>                                |  |
| Monday<br>3/22                                | No Zoom Class – Critical Analysis Paper conferences  |
| Wednesday<br>3/24                             | No Zoom Class – Critical Analysis Paper conferences  |
| Friday 3/26                                   | No Zoom Class – Critical Analysis Paper conferences  |
| <b>Unit 4: Picturing the End of the World</b> |  |
| <b>Week 12</b>                                |  |
| Monday<br>3/29                                | Ben Fisher and Emily S. Whitten – <i>The Underfoot</i> , Vol. 1<br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____   |
| Wednesday<br>3/31                             | Ben Fisher and Emily S. Whitten – <i>The Underfoot</i> , Vol. 1<br><br>Lisa Rowe Fraustino – “The Rights and Wrongs of Anthropomorphism in Picture Books” (Canvas)   |
| Friday 4/2                                    | Ben Fisher and Emily S. Whitten – <i>The Underfoot</i> , Vol. 1<br><br><b>Due: Critical Analysis Paper</b>   |
| <b>Week 13</b>                                |  |
| Monday 4/5                                    | Cherie Dimaline – <i>The Marrow Thieves</i> (“Frenchie’s Coming-To Story” through “The Four Winds”) (Canvas)<br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____  |
| Wednesday<br>4/7                              | Cherie Dimaline – <i>The Marrow Thieves</i> (“Wab’s Coming-To Story” through “The Long Stumble”) (Canvas)<br><br>Clare Bradford – “Postcolonial” Keyword Essay (Canvas)<br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____ |
| Friday 4/9                                    | Cherie Dimaline – <i>The Marrow Thieves</i> (“Rogarou Comes Hunting” to end) (Canvas)  |
| <b>Week 14</b>                                |  |
| Monday<br>4/12                                | Max Brallier – <i>The Last Kids on Earth</i> , Book 1 (Canvas)   |

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
|                   | Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____   |
| Wednesday<br>4/14 | Max Brallier – <i>The Last Kids on Earth</i> , Book 1 (Canvas)  |
| Friday 4/16       | View the animated adaptation of <i>The Last Kids on Earth</i> , <i>Book 1</i> on Netflix<br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____ |
| <b>Week 15</b>    |   |
| Monday<br>4/19    | Excerpt from <i>This Place: 150 Years Retold</i> (Canvas)<br><br>Discussion Leaders: _____ and _____                                |
| Wednesday<br>4/21 | Wrapping Up and Course Evaluations  |
| Friday 4/23       | <b>No Class – Reading Days</b>  |
| <b>Week 16</b>    |   |
| Monday<br>4/26    | <b>Due: Syllabus Design Proposal</b>  |