

Ocean Life



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Texts and Contexts, Engl. 2000, R 21
Online Summer 2020

Class Time:

Synchronous Zoom Meetings:
10:00 am - 12:00 pm | online

Office Hours:

12:00 – 1:00 pm (online), and by appointment

Course Overview

Covering 71% of the globe, the oceans are filled with a vast array of life, from blue whales, the largest animals to ever exist, to microscopic phytoplankton that provide over 50% of the oxygen we breath. In this course, we will take a deep dive into humanity's ever-developing imagination of ocean life, exploring how literary depictions of ocean life can reveal surprising insights into our own human history and culture. Topics of discussion will include historical depictions of dangerous ocean life, the experiences of sailors adrift at sea, Afrofuturist visions of the ocean depths, recent representations of megafauna like whales and sharks, and how ocean life has been affected by humanity. A wide range of genres will be covered, including novellas, short stories, poetry, music, and film, and issues including race, gender, and the rights of animals will be addressed. "Ocean Life" will also develop your techniques of close reading and your ability to construct and support an argument out of your own observations about the texts.

READING LIST

- Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*. Vintage; Reissue edition (ISBN: 9780679722052). Amazon Link: <https://amazon.com/Shipwrecked-Sailor-Gabriel-Garcia-Marquez/dp/067972205X>
- Rivers Solomon, *The Deep*. Gallery / Saga Press (ISBN: 9781534439863). Amazon Link: <https://amazon.com/Deep-Rivers-Solomon/dp/1534439862>
- Witi Ihimaera, *The Whale Rider*. Harcourt (ISBN: 9780152050160). Amazon Link: <https://www.amazon.com/Whale-Rider-Witi-Ihimaera/dp/0152050167>

We will also watch films and listen to music, and you will need to “rent” an episode of BBC’s *The Blue Planet* and Studio Ghibli’s film *Ponyo*.

READING LIST

Developing Human-Ocean Life Relations

Day 1

Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Ocean” (1852), Derek Walcott, “The Sea is History” (1979), “The Seafarer” (ca. 900 CE)

Discussing these three poems will provide us with different understandings of how the ocean and ocean depths have been imagined at different times and for different reasons. Questions of history, technology, and the different ways humans have imagined ocean life will circulate.

Day 2

Blue Planet

A visually stunning introduction to ocean life.

Adrift at Sea

Day 3

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* (1970, trans. 1986). Read Introduction (“The Story of this Story”) and Chapters 1-6 (up to pg. 49).

Marquez’s first book is the fascinating true story of a sailor’s survival adrift in the Gulf of Mexico. While floating in a raft, the sailor has close encounters with a number of creatures found the Gulf’s depths and overhead. Indeed, his very survival depends on these creatures.

Day 4

One-on-one conferences.

Day 5

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* (1970, trans. 1986). Read Chapters 7 on (pg. 50 to end of book)

Culturally Connected With Whales

Day 6

1. Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands" (1993)

2. Witi Ihimaera, *The Whale Rider* (1999). Read "Author's Note," Chapters 1-7 (up to pg. 45). Hau'ofa's groundbreaking essay is central to understanding the interconnectivity of Pacific islands and islanders. Ocean life also appears in surprising ways in this article too. Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* tackles the intersection of Maori tribal politics and gender, while also juxtaposing the main character's growth, and the history of the tribe, with the lives of a humpback whales.

Day 7

Witi Ihimaera, *The Whale Rider* (1999). Read Chapters 8-21 (pg. 46 to end of book).

Day 8

One-on-one conferences.

History, From the Depths

Day 9

1. Marcus Rediker, "Life, Death and Terror in the Slave Trade," from *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (2007).

2. Learn about Afrofuturism by watching this short clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIPwTMMhGGI>

And reading the following site: <https://medium.com/@nicolas.celnik/key-words-and-dates-to-understand-afrofuturism-77bc7bf7851a>

3. Watch "Afrofuturism and the Myth of Drexciya"

<https://vimeo.com/313823024>.

4. Check out a sampling of Drexciya's music on Youtube (don't need to listen to whole album, can check out Drexciya via Spotify, etc. instead)

i. [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLryJ-](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLryJ-4UNwXnfNR1h7RHPT2 TT6hu91G1o)

[4UNwXnfNR1h7RHPT2 TT6hu91G1o](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLryJ-4UNwXnfNR1h7RHPT2 TT6hu91G1o)

ii. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7G6MnqmBOc>

5. Listen to clipping.'s "The Deep"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zT1ujfuXFVo>

(lyrics: <https://www.lyricsmode.com/clipping-the-deep-1736727.html>)

6. Rivers Solomon, *The Deep* (2019). Read "Afterword" (pg. 157-163).

In this series of readings, videos, and audio clips we move from transatlantic slavery, and the sharks that followed slave ships, to contemporary responses to the slave trade. Central to our

discussion will be the genre of afrofuturism, and how afrofuturism has reimagined the ocean depths. Our discussions will lay the foundation for understanding Solomon's *The Deep*, which draws on the clipping, song of the same name, and the earlier electronic duo Drexciya, in imagining an underwater race descended from pregnant women thrown from slave ships.

Day 10

Rivers Solomon, *The Deep* (2019). Read Chapters 1-5 (pgs. 1-95)

Day 11

Rivers Solomon, *The Deep* (2019). Read Chapters 6-9 (pgs. 96-155)

Ocean Waste and the Anthropocene

Day 12

1. Patricia Yaeger. "Sea Trash, Dark Pools, and the Tragedy of the Commons." Editor's Column PMLA 125.3. (2010): 523-545.

2. Studio Ghibli film *Ponyo*

Yaeger's article not only serves as an important moment in ocean studies, it also succinctly raises the issue of waste in the ocean. We will pair our discussion of Yaeger's article with the film *Ponyo*, an imaginative vision of ocean life that visually and narratively presents the threats of ocean waste and grapples with the Anthropocene.

Day 13

1. Reading TBD. (We will discuss beforehand if we would like to select a film to discuss today (*Finding Nemo*? *Jaws*?). We will also discuss and work on Final Essays.

Day 14

One-on-one conferences.

Day 15

Final Essay is due by class time. During class you will also provide an approx. 5 minute presentation describing your Final Essay to the class.