

**HISTORY 2198B: NATURE, SPIRITS, CULTURE**

| Winter 2025|

TBA, Time-TBA pm| Room TBA

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**Department of History, Lawson Hall 1220**

**Office Hours: TBA**

**Opening Invocation:** To the Sun, in whose tight embrace we and other planets travel the Cosmos free of charge, we are grateful. To the Earth, the ground of our being, we are grateful. To all fellow creatures on this planet, on land, in the air, and in the waters, we are grateful; we apologize that our human ways have ravaged your ways of life on this planet. To all our personal and collective ancestors, we are grateful. *We are grateful to the land of the Dish With One Spoon Treaty Territory, the ancestral territory of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations where this course takes place.*

### **Course Description**

Welcome, welcome. This introductory course is an invitation to an embodied way of learning about the past and its memory. Grounded in the indigenous knowledge ways of the peoples of Africa, and fanning to other parts of the world outside of North America, students will be introduced to historical ideas and practices of animal, plant, water, avian, and human agency, interdependency, and regeneration on this planet and beyond. In essence, this course is an invitation to experience the fruits of calls to decolonize the curriculum and to learn history in ways that engage more than just the mind, but all of one's being.

### **Course Syllabus**

The main skills you will learn, and practice, include:

- Individual Work, Set Group Work, and Fluid Group Work.
- Demonstrate the difference between cultural engagement and appropriation.
- Hone the historian's craft of crafting persuasive written argumentation for further research.

Please note: This is a reading, thinking, and bodily-engaged course whose practice is geared for all disabilities and abilities. Those students interested in honing their critical thinking and writing skills, their reading and bodily engagement skills individually and communally will find this a rewarding course.



## Methods of Evaluation

- ◆ **20% Preparation, Attendance, and Participation (PrAP).**
  - ◆ Preparation means having read class material or watched the film ahead of class. Attendance means coming to class every week and missing a maximum of two (2) classes after which points will be deducted each time class is missed. Participation means being ready with questions, comments, and reflections on course material to deepen our learning and expand our engagement with the subject matter.
- ◆ **30% Set Group Work**
  - ◆ Set Group Work means an assigned a posse after week 1 of class. This will be your anchor group with whom you will do certain assignments to mimic the steadiness of, for example, date and place of birth or companion spirit, factors that do not change once they have happened. This is your go to group for checking in about the course. The skill here is learning to be of the Earth.
- ◆ **30% Fluid Group Work**
  - ◆ Fluid Group Work means a changing set of groups that you will be a part of and will also include you choosing which group you want to be a part of for a particular assignment. This mimics the changes in nature or in cultures, or in humans as they grow over time. This skill here is learning to be of the Sun.
- ◆ **20% Individual Reflection Essay**
  - ◆ Individual Reflection Essay means the capstone essay where you will reflect on all you learned during the semester and what you will take forward with you after this course. The skill here is learning to be a cosmic being rooted on Earth.

## Absences and Late Assignments:

- Students with an approved absence from an in-class assignment will be required to write a make-up assignment. The make-up assignment will not necessarily be in the same format, be of the same duration, or cover the same material as the original assignment. For the university's policies on this, see the following: [Absence & Academic Consideration](#), the university's policies on [Academic Consideration for Medical Illness](#), and the Department of History's own

[Undergraduate Policies and Statements](#), for department procedures and requirements.

- Students can miss up to a maximum of two (2) class meetings in order to pass the course, regardless of grades received for other assignments.
- Students must submit all course assignments to pass the course.
- Make-up assignments, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Counselling.

**Course Materials:** Most course materials will be excerpts from some of the books below or stand-alone essays, articles, and documentary films. Reading materials will be mostly available via Brightspace and the Weldon Library, and you can purchase books from the Western Bookstore. Documentary and feature films will be freely available via the Western Libraries through your Library Account. Examples of readings are:

- Malidoma Sómo, *Of Water and the Spirit*
- *The Seeds of Vandana Shiva* (film)
- Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*
- Wangari Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*
- Credo Mutwa, *Indaba, My Children*
- Fortune & Hodza, *Shona Praise Poetry*
- Kimmerer & Smith, *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge...*



**Course Schedule and Readings:**

Week 01: **Greeting the Land, One Another, and a Definition of Terms**

Part 1: **Nature**, Culture, Spirits

Week 02: The Cosmos, Creation, the Big Bang, and Human History Making

Week 03: Plant Life, Animal Life, and the Spirits of Nature

Week 04: Humans as Nature, Humanity's African Roots

Week 05: The Planet and Solar System, Human Historical Views

Part 2: **Culture**, Nature, Spirits

Week 06: The Spirit of Nature in Human Cultures

Week 07: SPRING READING WEEK

Week 08: Ecosystems as Cultures, Cultures as Ecosystems

Week 09: The Seed as History, History as the Seed

Part 3: **Spirits**, Nature, Culture

Week 10: Humans and Water

Week 11: Humans and Earth

Week 12: Humans and Fire

Week 13: Humans and Air

## **Additional Statements**

Communication policies: I am available via email, office hours, in-person, and or Zoom.

Classroom behavior: Respect is important, both in and outside the classroom. In the classroom it includes waiting your turn, being respectful of different points of view on different issues and leading with heart and mind. The classroom interaction includes watching films as well as close reading of texts electronically and in print.

Use of electronic devices: There will be short breaks during the class time. To that end, please keep your devices in silent (without vibration) mode, or better, in airplane mode and store until breaktime and after class.

Use of generative AI tools: The use of generative AI tools like ChatGPT is permitted in this course for activities such as brainstorming and refining your ideas, drafting an outline to organize your thoughts, or checking grammar and style. Any use of such tools should be properly documented and cited. If in doubt, please ask me for clarification, or better yet, check with the Western Writing Center for University-wide policies.

Please review the Department of History’s shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at:  
[https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program\\_module\\_information/policies.html](https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html) for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.

