Interested in Incorporating Environmental Ethics and Climate Fiction into Your Curriculum?

Hello! My name’s Ethan Saulnier, and I’m a second year Master’s student in University of Montana’s Environmental Philosophy M.A. program. I am reaching out to Missoula high school English teachers to survey your interest in bringing any amount of environmental ethics and climate fiction literature into your course materials. I am wanting to start conversations about the possibility of such curricular change – whether teachers are open or excited about this, and if your teaching standards could accommodate it – as well as gauge how your students are currently being prepared in environmental thinking.

I am working with Jeff Ross and Louise Economides in the UM English department to compile a list of relevant climate-fiction readings, which I would present to any interested teachers. Then, I’m using the UM library to record a series of short videos that explain basic concepts in environmental ethics, which I’d also offer to interested teachers, as a resource for instructing students on ideas and themes underlying cli-fi literature.

Namely, I’ll make videos on the following four areas:

• animal ethics: the moral status of animals, how to ethically relate to them, and how to think through resolving conflicts in wildlife management and animal agriculture where competing interests arise

• the distinction between biocentrism, a benign anthropocentrism, and an arrogant anthropocentrism, and how these relate to the non-use, wise use, and unsustainable abuse of the earth’s resources

• agroecology as a mode of food-production and land-tending: community farming and mutual aid, and how these embody an environmental care ethics, the idea of ‘entanglement’, and weave together environmental and social justice

 • the idea of the Anthropocene, questions of hope and grief in the Anthropocene, as well as “collective action problems” and whether an individual alone can enact meaningful change.

The impetus for this project and my desire to survey your interest in collaboration, comes foremost from an assessment of climate change as an existential threat to human and more-than-human life on earth. It’s my conviction that we would benefit from these basic frameworks of sense-making to help us respond to the urgency of our times. Moreover, your students and young people in general will be most impacted by climate change. Further, Missoula has a strong environmental culture, and I suspect that some of your students will pursue careers in land management, recreation and conservation, regenerative agriculture, environmental economics, etc., and therefore could benefit from preparation in environmental thinking. Finally, I think that mental health struggles among young folks are at least partly related to fears over an uninhabitable planet in the future. Therefore, one anecdote to hopelessness is becoming aware of a positive vision such as agroecology and mutual aid – models of living that regenerate the earth and human spirit – as well as the contours of individual and collective action around questions of hope.

I hope to elaborate more on the above and start a dialogue with any teachers who presently find themselves intrigued. I’m curious about your students’ current preparation into environmental thinking, whether you’re open to advancing such education, and if your teaching standards would permit these adjustments. If interested, you can contact me at ethan.saulnier@umontana.edu -- we can talk over email and/or plan to meet in person. I’ve prepared a compilation of cli-fi readings, and we could talk about the material in my video series so that you feel comfortable guiding the students to observe these themes underlying the readings. Thanks so much for your consideration!

Warm regards,

Ethan Saulnier