



“It is the nature of the human mind to seek, to touch, to understand and occupy vast unknowable terrains, but which of our daily environments resist comprehension? This anthology includes unknowable psychological landscapes, confounding emotional habitats, the shapeless environs of both speculation and perception, those territories where mind and body, physical and psychological, meet and cohabitate without reconciliation.”
—*Portland Review*

TEACHING GUIDE

Unchartable: On Environmental Unknowns

Portland Review 2019, Volume 65

978-0-9974617-3-2 / \$16 / portlandreview.org

Recommended Courses: Creative Writing, Literature and Ecology, Environmental Studies, Geography and Society, Natural Science, Environmental Ethics and Sustainability, Global Perspectives, and Social Justice.

Keywords: Poetry, Fiction, Memoir, Experimental, Environment, Unconscious, Climate Change.

Discussion Questions:

1. How might creative writing aid in communication across disciplines and how might this communication be a benefit to our society as a whole?
2. What are the benefits of understanding another perspective or worldview when it comes to climate change or other ecological concerns? Consider “The Silk Mothers” by Mackenzie Bethune and “Cells” by Sean Hickey.
3. How might creative writing be considered a subversive act? Consider “High Rise: A Final Report” by Matt Leibel.

4. In what ways can creative writing and art be healing (for an individual, or a community)? Consider, “Tatau” by April Alvarez.
 5. How does art function as a form of activism in the face of global challenges?
 6. In what ways does the perception of “nature” and who can access it (or feel safe in it) differ between genders? Ethnicities? Why? Consider “A Quiet Day with the West on Fire” by Margot Kahn Case.
 7. How does creative writing enter The discourse surrounding environmental issues and how does it fit amongst other forms of communication, such as science writing or even peer-reviewed studies? Consider “The Smell of Pennies” by Rita Stevens.
 8. In what ways is truth skewed by personal or historical memory? How do we remain objective when perception of the truth can vary so widely between individuals? Consider “Set Play” by Amalia Gladhart.
 9. How does the concept of “dominion” differ between cultures and how might that difference contribute to the ways humans interact with their environment? Consider “The Powder-Men in the Trees” by Jeff Frawley.
 10. What methods do the writers in *Unchartable: On Environmental Unknowns* use to get their points across most effectively? What techniques or forms bring the reader closer? Alienate the reader? Consider the poems “At the Corner of 6th and Pine” by WLS (Wendy Lee Spacek) and “A Thousand Knots” by Stacey Park.
 11. Compare and contrast the different ways the “unknown” is addressed or complicated in *Unchartable: On Environmental Unknowns*. Consider “What I Don’t Know About Love” by Tianli Kilpatrick.
-

Possible Assignments:

1. Write your own letter to future generations. What might you say to them concerning the present? About actions being taken (or not taken)?
2. Choose a character from a favorite book or from your own creative writing and place the character in a different geographic and cultural environment. How might the character’s thoughts and actions adapt to the new surroundings?