SLIDE 1 ECO-SCRIPT

Ecoliterature

American Literature of Nature, Ecology and the Environment

Listen to this passage from *The End of Nature by* Bill McKibbon read by the three of us. It is the starting point of our exploration of Ecoliterature: American literature of nature, ecology and the environment.

SLIDE 2

A1most every day I hike up the hill out my back door. Within a hundred yards the woods swallows me up, and there is nothing to remind me of human society—no trash, no stumps, no fence, not even a real path. Looking out from the high places, you can't see road or house; it is a world apart from man. But once in a while someone will be cutting wood farther down the valley, and the snarl of a chain saw will fill the woods. It is harder on those days to get caught up in the timeless meaning of the forest, for man is nearby. The sound of the chain saw doesn't blot out all the noises of the forest or drive the animals away, but it does drive away the feeling that you are in another, separate, timeless, wild sphere…

An idea, a relationship, can go extinct, just like an animal or a plant. The idea in this case is "nature," the separate and wild province, the world apart from man to which he adapted, under whose rules he was born and died. In the past, we spoiled and polluted parts of that nature, inflicted environmental "damage?' But that was like stabbing a man with toothpicks: though it hurt, annoyed, degraded, it did not touch vital organs, block the path of the lymph or blood. We never thought that we had wrecked nature. Deep down, we never really thought we could: it was too big and too old; its forces—the wind, the rain, the sun—were too strong, too elemental.

But, quite by accident, it turned out that the carbon dioxide and other gases we were producing in our pursuit of a better life—in pursuit of warm houses and eternal economic growth and of agriculture so productive it would free most of us from farming—*could* alter the power of the sun, could increase its heat. And that increase *could* change patterns of moisture and dryness, breed storms in new places, breed deserts. Those things may or may not have yet begun to happen, but it is too late to altogether prevent them from happening We have produced the carbon dioxide—we are ending nature.

[Your attempts to lose yourself in nature. What does he mean by the end of nature?]

The writer and environmentalist, Bill McKibbon calls environmental writing “America’s single most distinctive contribution to world literature.” He is talking about ecoliterature, nature writing with an ecological edge. We have put together this informal reader’s theater of contemporary readings in ecoliterature as part of our ICL class on the environment. During the presentation we will read in our various voices passages from literature about nature, ecology, and environmentalism and stop throughout the program for discussion.

Some might object to ecoliterature. Wouldn’t a literature devoted to the environment just devolve into a preachy, didactic writing which is not literature at all? The poet Jorie Graham answered the complaint this way. Suspicious readers “feel they know this information already, so why do they need it in a poem. That is precisely the point. They ‘know’ it. They are not feeling it. That is what activists in the environmental movement are asking of us: help it be felt. Help it be imagined.”

The premise here is that the environmental crisis is not only a failure to act, it is also a failure of the imagination. Out task today is to do more than understand this crisis. It is to “help it be felt. Help it be imagined.” Let’s begin by

SLIDE 3

Imagining Loss

The consensus among conscientious biologists is that we’re headed for another mass extinction, a vale of biological impoverishment commensurate with the big five extinctions of the past: Ordovician, Devonian, Permian, Triassic, Cretaceous. It is probably a good ways off because humans are tenacious, like weeds, and we may slow the descent, but we can’t stop it.

*from* “For a Coming Extinction”

*by* W. S. Merwin

Gray whale

Now that we are sending you to The End

That great god

Tell him

That we who follow you invented forgiveness

And forgive nothing…

When you have left the seas nodding on their stalks

Empty of you

Tell him that we were made

On another day…

When you will not see again

The whale calves trying the light

Consider what you will find in the black garden

And its court

The sea cows the Great Auks the gorillas

The irreplaceable hosts ranged countless

And fore-ordaining as stars

Our sacrifices

Join your word to theirs

Tell him

That it is we who are important

SLIDE 4

What would life be like on the way to this mass extinction? The writer, David Quamman describes it in his book *Planet of Weeds*. To make his point he borrows a metaphor from Homer Dixon: "Think of a stretch limo in the potholed streets of New York City, where homeless beggars live. Inside the limo are the air-conditioned post-industrial regions of North America, Europe, the emerging Pacific Rim, and a few other isolated places, with their trade summitry and computer information highways. Outside is the rest of mankind, going in a completely different direction." Here is David Quamman:

*from* *Planet of Weeds*

*by* David Quamman

My own guess about the mid-term future [before the next mass extinction] is that our Planet of Weeds will indeed be a crummier place, a lonelier and uglier place, and a particularly wretched place for the 2 billion people comprising [the] absolute poor.  What will increase most dramatically as time proceeds, I suspect, won't be generalized misery or futuristic modes of consumption but the gulf between two global classes experiencing those extremes.  Progressive failure of ecosystem functions?  Yes, but human resourcefulness … will probably find stopgap technological remedies, to be available for a price.

So the world's privileged class—that's your class and my class—will probably still manage to maintain themselves inside Homer-Dixon's stretch limo, drinking bottled water and breathing bottled air and eating reasonably healthy food that has become incredibly precious, while the potholes in the road outside grow ever deeper.  Eventually the limo will look more like a lunar rover.  Ragtag mobs of desperate souls will cling to its bumpers, like groupies on Elvis's final Cadillac.  The absolute poor will suffer their lack of ecological privilege in the form of lowered life expectancy, bad health, absence of education, corrosive want, and anger.  Maybe in time they'll find ways to gather themselves in localized revolt against the affluent class, and just set to eating them, as Wells's Morlocks ate the Eloi.  Not likely, though, as long as affluence buys guns.  In any case, well before that they will have burned the last stick of Bornean dipterocarp for firewood and roasted the last lemur, the last grizzly bear, the last elephant left unprotected outside a zoo.

SLIDE 5

In fact, this degradation of the world’s poor has already begun.

*from* Ezra Pound’s Proposition

*by* Robert Hass

…Not more than fourteen, she saunters up to you

Outside the Shangri-la Hotel

And says, in plausible English,

"How about a party, big guy?"

Here is more or less how it works:

The World Bank arranges the credit and the dam

Floods three hundred villages, and the villagers find their way

To the city where their daughters melt into the teeming streets,

And the dam’s great turbine, beautifully tooled

In Lund or Dresden or Detriot, financed

by Lazard Freres in Paris or the Morgan Bank in New York,

enabled by judicious gifts from Bechtel of San Fransisco

or Halliburton in Houston to the local political elite,

Spun by the force of rushing water,

Have become hives of shimmering silver

And, down river, they throw that bluish throb of light

Across her cheekbones and her lovely skin.

[DISCUSS QUOTATIONS]

SLIDE 6

Imagining Our Way Back

So how do we imagine our way back from this waste land? Where can we find solace when despair for the world and the future of the planet grows in us. Where can we find “the peace of wild things?”

*from* “The Peace of Wild Things”

*by* Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me

 and I wake in the night at the least sound

 in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,

 I go and lie down where the wood drake

 rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

 I come into the peace of wild things

 who do not tax their lives with forethought

 of grief. I come into the presence of still water.

 And I feel above me the day-blind stars

 waiting with their light. For a time

 I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

SLIDE 7

Let’s follow animals into the “grace of the world.” Here is a montage of selected bits from prose and poetry about animals as guides for reimagining our place in the world. When we finish we will take time to discuss them. Let’s read them in succession and then talk.

*from* “Should the Fox Come Again to My Cabin in the Snow”

*by* Patricia Fargnoli

Then, the winter will have fallen all in white

and the hill will be rising to the north,

the night also rising and leaving,

dawn light just coming in, the fire out.

Down the hill running will come that flame

among the dancing skeletons of the ash trees.

I will leave the door open for him.

SLIDE 8

*from* “the beginning of the end of the world”

*by* Lucille Clifton

maybe the morning the roaches

walked into the kitchen

bold with they bad selves

marching up out of the drains

not like soldiers like priests

grim and patient in the sink

and when we ran the water

trying to drown them as if they were

soldiers they seemed to bow their

sad heads for us not at us

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*from The Ninemile Wolves*

*by* Rick Bass

Late at night I like to imagine that they are killing: that another deer has gone down in a tangle of legs, tackled in deep snow; and that, once again, the wolves are feeding. That they have saved themselves, once again. That the deer or moose calf, or young dumb elk is still warm (steam rising from the belly as that part which contains the entrails is opened first), is now dead, or dying

They eat everything, when they kill, even the snow that soaks up the blood.

This all goes on usually at night. They catch their prey from behind, often, but also by the nose, the face, the neck whatever they can dart in and grab without being kicked. When the prey pauses, or buckles, it's over; the prey's hindquarters, or neck, might be torn out, and in that manner, the prey flounders. The wolves swarm it, then. They don't have thumbs. All they've got is teeth, long legs, and—I have to say this—great hearts.

SLIDE 10

*from The Last Panda*

*by* George B. Schaller

In the stillness, leaves suddenly rustled and a stem cracked like breaking glass. Shrouded in bamboo was a giant panda, a female, slumped softly in the snow, her back propped against a shrub. Leaning to one side, she reached out and hooked a bamboo stem with the ivory claws of a forepaw, bent in the stem, and with a fluid movement bit it off near the base. Stem firmly grasped, she sniffed it to verify that it was indeed palatable, and then ate it end-first like a stalk of celery. While her powerful molars sectioned and crushed the stem, she glanced around for another, her movements placid and skillful, a perfect ecological integration between panda and bamboo…

From below, near where forest gave way to field, came the sound of an ax. The bamboo around her like armor against intruders, she listened and then moved away, shunning any possible confrontation. She traveled on a private path along the slope, insinuating herself from thicket to thicket, moving like a cloud shadow, navigating with precision through the sea of stems, with only her tracks a record of her silent passing.

SLIDE 11

*from The Ecology of Magic*

*by* David Abram

Late one evening I stepped out of my little hut in the rice paddies of eastern Bali and found myself falling through space. Over my head the black sky was rippling with stars, densely clustered in some regions, almost blocking out the darkness between them, and more loosely scattered in other areas, pulsing and beckoning to each other. Behind them all streamed the great river of light with its several tributaries. Yet the Milky Way churned beneath me as well, for my hut was set in the middle of a large patchwork of rice paddies…[B]y night the stars themselves glimmered from the surface of the paddies, and the river of light whirled through the darkness underfoot as well as above… I might have been able to reorient myself, to regain some sense of ground and gravity, were it not for a fact that confounded my senses entirely: between the constellations below and the constellations above drifted countless fireflies, their lights flickering like the stars, some drifting up to join the clusters of stars overhead, others, like graceful meteors, slipping down from above to join the constellations underfoot, and all these paths of light upward and downward were mirrored, as well, in the still surface of the paddies. I felt myself at times falling through space, at other moments floating and drifting. I simply could not dispel the profound vertigo and giddiness; the paths of the fireflies, and their reflections in the water's surface, held me in a sustained trance… Fireflies!

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*from The Song of the White Pelican*

*by* Jack Turner

[E]very time they land on the river, it looks like a disaster. They drop the backs of their huge wings, throw out their feet like wheels, and land with a controlled crash—like a 747. Every time, they almost nose over; every time, they just make it. Then, to regain their composure, they tuck their bills into their chests with that snotty satisfied-English butler look and casually paddle off after more trout, buoyant as a well-greased fly. As the poet Onitsura says,

The water-bird

Looks heavy,

—But it floats!'

SLIDE 13

*from* If the Owl Calls Again

*by* John Haines

[If the owl calls again] at dusk from the island in the river, and it’s not too cold, I’ll wait for the moon to rise, then take wing and glide to meet him. We will not speak, but hooded against the frost soar above the alder flats, searching with tawny eyes. And then we’ll sit in the shadowy spruce and pick the bones of careless mice, while the long moon drifts toward Asia and the river mutters in its icy bed. And when the morning climbs the limbs we’ll part without a sound, fulfilled, floating homeward as the cold world awakens.

SLIDE 14

*from* Eagle Poem

by JOY HARJO

Like eagle that Sunday morning

Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky

In wind, swept our hearts clean

With sacred wings.

We see you, see ourselves and know

That we must take the utmost care

And kindness in all things.

Breathe in, knowing we are made of

All this, and breathe, knowing

We are truly blessed because we

Were born, and die soon within a

True circle of motion,

Like eagle rounding out the morning

Inside us.

We pray that it will be done

In beauty.

In beauty.

SLIDE 15

*from* “The Supple Deer”

*by* Jane Hirshfield

The quiet opening

between fence strands

perhaps eighteen inches.

Antlers to hind hooves,

four feet off the ground,

the deer poured through.

No tuft of the coarse white belly hair left behind.

I don’t know how a stag turns

into a stream, an arc of water.

I have never felt such accurate envy.

Not of the deer:

To be that porous, to have such largeness pass through me.

SLIDE 16

From Heart and Blood: Living with Deer

By Richard Nelson

A light drizzle falls, just enough to set the grass and leaves glistening. In the quiet moments that follow, the deer rolls on her side and sprawls to her fullest length with her neck stretched out, head wavering up and down, tail flashing and tensing. What happens next is so sudden and so unexpected—despite all that's come before—that I am wholly unprepared to see it.

Still lying on one side, she raises her uppermost hind leg off the ground, arches her neck, and reaches her head back. Then, out from beneath the flared white tail slips something long and wet and shining and very dark.

I want to jump and shout aloud for the joy of it, but instead I hold the binoculars to my eyes, arms aching and muscles shivering.

Half visible beside the mother's loins, a dusky-brown mass gathers itself together, moves in confused, spasmodic jerks, and becomes a fawn—a tiny, throbbing, trembling, living fleck of earth.

[DISCUSS QUOTATIONS]

SLIDE 17

Re-imagining the Relationship between Nature and Culture

For the scientist, ecology is the study of the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment; it seeks to understand the vital connections between plants and animals and the world around them. What writers hope to do is reimagine the relationship between nature and culture, perception and knowledge so that we can feel those connections and the damage that has been done to them.

*from* “Ecology”

*by* Jack Collom

Surrounded by bone, surrounded by cells,

by rings, by rings of hell, by hair, surrounded by

air-is-a-thing, surrounded by silhouette, by honey-wet bees, yet

by skeletons of trees, surrounded by actual, yes, for practical

purposes, people, surrounded by surreal

popcorn, surrounded by the reborn: Surrender in the center

to surroundings. O surrender forever, never

end her, let her blend around, surrender to the surroundings that

surround the tender endo-surrender, that

tumble through the tumbling to that blue that

curls around the crumbling, to that, the blue that

rumbles under the sun bounding the pearl that

we walk on, talk on; we can chalk that

up to experience, sensing the brown here that’s

blue now, a drop of water surrounding a cow that’s

black & white, the warbling Blackburnian twitter that’s

machining midnight orange in the light that’s

glittering in the light green visible wind. That’s

the ticket to the tunnel through the thicket that’s

a cricket’s funnel of music to correct & pick it out

from under the wing that whirls up over & out.

SLIDE 18

Sometimes the way we talk about nature and our lives gets in the way. Listen to the two characters in this prose poem trying, and failing, to talk their way back to the quiet of nature.

*from* On the rocks

*by* Camille T. Dungy

I said, the cruise line said we might see wandering albatross. I said, they said we could walk through penguin rookeries. I said, we might see at least four species of seal. What do you have against traveling where black people are? she said. That's not my idea of a nice trip, she said. My friend said, give me pink coral sand and a Mai Tai. Give me so hot men wear nothing but swim trunks, she said. Give me hot men. She said, all those days out there with nothing to do? She said, no bowling? no movies? no shops? I said, they said we would have a chance to kayak. She said I said the Drake Passage was notorious for bad conditions. I said that was true. I said, however, we'd be further south by then, in the protected bays where the Southern Ocean meets the most southerly continent. She said, oh. I said I thought if I paddled far enough from the ship I might hear icebergs melting. I said, they said we could hear gas escaping from the ice. I said, they said it would sound a bit like a soda can being slowly opened. I said I thought it would sound like what it might sound like to find myself paddling through a giant highball of vodka on the rocks, the can of tonic being opened, everything I needed right there. You wouldn't catch me out there, she said, floating with nothing but a life vest and a kayak. I said, quiet. I want to hear what quiet really sounds like.

SLIDE 19

The way we choose to live and raise our families is part of the problem as well and we feel it as a deepening sense of unease between our lies and the natural world that once nurtured us. We may sense the ancient connection between ourselves and the land but we also sense it slipping away. Here are four pieces by poets and prose writers exploring that severed connection.

*from* “West Texas”

*by* B. H. Fairchild

My red Ford running to rust idles

along the roadside, one headlight

swinging out across the plains,

the other blind. In the rear window

dawn light spills over my children

sprawling tangled in the backseat

beneath an army blanket. My wife

sleeps in front where the radio loses

itself in static, and even Del Rio

is a distant shout. From rig

to rig like this every few months,

the road looming toward more sky,

bunchgrass, sometimes a stooped,

ragged dump of trees. Always

a thin curtain of dust in the air.

Coffee sours through the night,

and I toss the grounds like seeds

from another country over the dry

shoulder. Driving high and sleepless,

I dream awake: faces like strange

gray flowers form and vanish,

my father kneeling in the road,

then looking up. Stay put, let the land

claim you, he always said. But here

men own you and the land you drill

and you move on. My one headlight

dims in the morning light. The other

mirrors back the road, the whitening sky.

Far ahead a hawk is sweeping

into view on wide, black wings.

SLIDE 20

*from* The Ecology of Magic

*by* David Abram

[When visiting a family in Bali] I saw an array of tiny platters, [and] I asked my hostess what they were for. Patiently she explained that they were offerings for the household spirits… The next morning… I notice a line of tiny black ants winding through the dirt to the offering. Peering still closer, I saw that two ants had already climbed onto the offering and were struggling with the uppermost kernel of rice; as I watched, one of them dragged the kernel down and off the leaf, then set off with it back along the line of ants advancing on the offering. The second ant took another kernel and climbed down with it, dragging and pushing, and fell over the edge of the leaf, then a third climbed onto the offering. The line of ants seemed to emerge from a thick clump of grass around a nearby palm tree. I walked into my room chuckling to myself: the balian and his wife had gone to so much trouble to placate the household spirits with gifts, only to have their offerings stolen by little six-legged thieves. What a waste! But then a strange thought dawned on me: what if the ants were the very "household spirits" to whom the offerings were being made?

SLIDE 21

*from* “My Dear Affluent Reader,”

*by* C. D. Wright

 Welcome to the Pecanland Mall. Sadly, the pecan grove had to be dozed to build it. Home Depot razed another grove. There is just the one grove left and the creeper and the ivy have blunted its sun. The uglification of your landscape is all but concluded. We are driving around the shorn suburb of your intelligence, the photographer and her factotum. Later we’ll walk in the shadows of South Grand. They say, in the heyday of natural gas there were houses with hinges of gold. They say so. We are gaining on the cancerous alley of our death. Which, when all is said or

unsaid, done or left undone, shriven or unforgiven, this business of dying is our most commonly held goal.

 Ready or not. 0 exceptions.

 Don’t ask.

SLIDE 22

*from* “Eating a Mountain”

*by* Deborah A. Miranda

You stand in the kitchen, cut

up a buck that a friend

shot for us. I watch you trim,

slice, decide: this is stir fry,

this is steak, this is stew.

These are treats for long-suffering

dogs on the porch, panting. Oh,

we are rich! I rinse, pack,

mark the cuts, this beautiful

deep red velvety offering.

Eating this deer means

eating this mountain:

acorns, ash, beech, dogwood,

maple, oak, willow, autumn olive;

means devouring witch hazel, pine,

lichens, mushrooms, wild grape,

fiddleheads, honeysuckle,

poison ivy, crown vetch,

clover; means nibbling wild onion,

ragweed, beggar’s lice, June grass,

raspberry cane, paw-paws,

crispy green chickweed,

and so you give the meat

your most honest attention,

dedicate your sharpest blade

to muscle, fat, sinew—

carve up that deer

with gratitude, artistry, prayer,

render a wild and sacred animal

into wild, sacred sustenance.

How we eat this deer is a debt

that comes due on the day

we let this mountain

eat us.

[DISCUSS QUOTATIONS]

SLIDE 23

Imagining a Way Out

Ecological literature about our connectedness with the natural world inexorably becomes environmental literature that calls us to action. Let’s begin with Julia Butterfly Hill who wrote a memoir about living in an old-growth tree named Luna for two years in order to save it. Later, with her fame she started the Circle of Life Foundation which has collaborated with hundreds of organizations to bring new activists into the environmental and social change movements. This passage describes how she was resupplied by her Earth First! Team.

*from The Legacy of Luna*

*by* Julia Butterfly Hill

The security guards and the activists, the latter cracking jokes and running around in circles, all dashed to the rope. Many of the activists had stuff sacks in their hands, but only some of those had supplies in them. The security guards didn't know whom to tackle. All they could do was go for the rope. Before they got there, one of the activists managed to dip a bag onto the rope.

"Twenty-three!" they shouted again, my cue to pull the haul bag back up.

A guard grabbed for it, but the activist took a flying leap and hit the bag downhill. The hill Luna stands on drops so steeply that one side of the tree's base is twelve feet lower than the other. By hitting the haul bag down toward the ravine, it flew above the security guard's hands. That was all I needed. My first yank pulled it up well above them, and then I was able to haul it safely to the top…

Of course, without my team there would have been nothing I could have done. Together, we were the tools trying to keep this vehicle of a movement running. In a car race, somebody is at the steering wheel, and at the finish line that driver gets the trophy and the spotlight. But everybody knows that he had a top-of-the-line car and a top-of-the-line pit crew, that all the bolts were tightened to perfection, and that everything was lubricated just right. So the trophy is not just for that car's driver, it represents the whole effort of all the people who worked on the car. And so with this movement: a victory comes from the efforts of everyone, not just me. Our trophy will be to find permanent protection for all the old growth while we save Luna. And we will all share that prize.

SLIDE 24

During the rise of the religious right in the 1980’s many environmentalists saw Christianity as an obstacle to their work, but Calvin DeWitt, an evangelical with a Ph.D. in zoology saw in the Christian idea of stewardship a Biblical basis for environmental action. He founded the Au Sable Institute in northern Michigan which organizes field courses and conferences to teach ecology and the Evangelical Environmental Network that campaigned to preserve endangered species.

*from* Inspirations for Sustaining Life on Earth

*by* Calvin DeWitt

The text of Genesis 2:15 expects that human beings to *abad* the garden and *shamar* it. *Shamar* means "to keep," and to keep in a very certain kind of way. Looking at another Hebrew word that means "to keep" is helpful in understanding its meaning, the word *natsar. Natsar* means preservationist keeping, like injecting a specimen with alcohol or formaldehyde to keep it on a museum shelf, or fixing a pressed plant specimen to an herbarium sheet to keep it in a herbarium. *Shamar*, however, means something quite different, perhaps best realized in the blessing of Aaron, "The Lord bless you and *shamar* you" (Numbers 6:24). The people who are blessed by their pastor or rabbi with this widely used benediction expect God to keep them, not as pickles in a jar, but keep them in all of their dynamic integrity. *Shamar* in this blessing means something like "May God, the Creator, keep you: with everything working right inside of you, everything working right psychologically, everything working right between you and all the people, and everything working right between you and the soil, and the air, and the land, and the rest of creation—everything in the biosphere"… Keeping of the creatures means keeping them within their habitats, not forever on arks!

SLIDE 25

People may appear to be the problem, but in many ways we are built—by our evolution—to make this change. That is the message of Paul Hawken a one-time entrepreneur who focuses his attention on the relations between ecology and business. In *Blessed Unrest* he argues that people were designed to protect the earth—it is what we were made to do.

*from Blessed Unrest*

*by* Paul Hawken

Antigens dot the surface of our body's cells like lapel pins that proudly proclaim, "It's me, don't hurt me, I am you"… With almost perfect symmetry, millions of different antibodies, proteins that can lock on to antigens as neatly as a key to a hasp, neutralize these invaders while simultaneously signaling for help. This is the beginning of the immune response, the ability of the body to maintain the self, to be a human rather than a petri dish for opportunistic microorganisms. The hundreds of thousands of organizations that make up the [environmental] movement are social antibodies attaching themselves to pathologies of power. Many will fail, for at present it is often a highly imperfect, and sometimes clumsy movement. It can flail, overreach, and founder; it has much to learn about how to work together, but it is what the earth is producing to protect itself…

Gerald Callahan, associate professor of immunology at Colorado State University [states] what may be obvious from an evolutionary view: the brain is part of the immune system.' While the immune system responds to microscopic threats, the brain defends against risk that is too big for our natural immunity to handle. "The mind is for bears, coral snakes, sharks, snapping turtles, wife beaters, and Buicks," explains Callahan. The immune system addresses organisms that have been around for billions of years; the brain confronts relatively newer dangers.

The massive growth of citizen-based organizations responds to threats that are new, immense, and, in some cases, game-ending... Five hundred years of ecological mayhem and social tyranny is a relatively short time for humanity to have learned to understand its self-created patterns of systematic pillage. What has changed recently, and has offered evidence that hope may be a rational act despite the onslaught of countervailing data, is the use of connectivity. Individuals are associating, hooking up, and identifying with one another… [T]hey are forming units, inventing again and again pieces of a larger organism… and assembling these into a mosaic of activity as if they were solving a jigsaw puzzle without ever having seen the picture on its box. The insanity of human destructiveness may be matched by an older grace and intelligence that is fastening us together in ways we have never before seen or imagined.

There is fierceness at work here. There is no other explanation for the raw courage and heart displayed over and again in the people who march, speak, create, resist, and build. It is the fierceness of knowing we are human and intend to survive… [F]aith and love are literally buried in our genes and lymphocytes, and what it takes to arrest our descent into chaos is one person after another remembering who and what they really are.

SLIDE 26

What is at stake, of course, are future generations as Gary Snyder reminds us.

*from* “For the Children”

*by* Gary Snyder

The rising hills, the slopes,

of statistics

lie before us.

the steep climb

of everything, going up,

up, as we all

go down.

In the next century

or the one beyond that,

they say,

are valleys, pastures,

we can meet there in peace

if we make it.

To climb these coming crests

one word to you, to

you and your children:

*stay together*

*learn the flowers*

*go light*

[DISCUSS QUOTATIONS]

SLIDE 27

We want to leave you with this final poem that ends with the essential question of our talk. It requires thought, imagination, and commitment, and it is addressed directly to you.

*from* “The Summer Day”

*by* Mary Oliver

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean—

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn’t everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

With your wild and precious life?

SLIDE 28