The Poet and the Natural World

Hayley Kolding

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The natural historian and the poet share an essential similarity in their attention to detail and in their sense of wonder. With its roots in the oral tradition of storytelling and song, poetry provides a rich way of engaging with and appreciating the natural world. In this course, we will cultivate an understanding and appreciation of poetic craft through reading and discussion of poems relating to natural history. Special attention will be given to poems by natural historians and to poems about New England flora, fauna, and ecosystems. Lectures and discussions will cover key aspects of poetic language and craft, as well as topics specific to the naturalist as poet. Daily field trips to various natural settings at and around Eagle Hill will include creative writing time with flexible levels of prompts and guidance, as well as lessons in plant identification. By grounding ourselves in our natural environment, we will heighten our sensitivity to natural imagery in the poems we read and will develop a richer and more precise vocabulary for describing nature in the poems we write.

Hayley Kolding (hayley.kolding@gmail.com) teaches English and is a member of the Connecticut Botanical Society. She studied English at Yale University with a focus in poetry and translation. As seen in her 2019 Eagle Hill lecture, Fraught Wonder: Reactions to the Rise of Science in “The Sensitive Plant” by Percy Bysshe Shelley, her writing and research often combine literature and natural history. Her poetry has appeared in The New Journal, These Fifty States, The Yale Herald, JOLT, and Kalliope.

about the instructor