

North Rim Writing on the Edge

with Thea Gavin
June 16-18, 2017



CLASS INFORMATION AND SYLLABUS

All canyon lovers are invited to experience Grand Canyon in a new way: as a place that not only offers the expected “grand” vistas, but also rewards intimate study—which means the only “requirement” for this workshop is that participants be willing to wander the forested trails of the North Rim with wide-open eyes, ears, noses, and hearts.

By combining some very practical techniques of observation with a variety of imaginative writing invitations, participants in “Writing on the Edge” will have many opportunities to connect with this spectacular place and deepen that connection through writing in a supportive setting tailored to participant interests.

Morning workshops will provide time to be inspired by the work of other nature writers, both by reading and discussing excerpts of published work--by authors such as Edward Abbey--as well as by composing and sharing impromptu responses to creative writing prompts.

Afternoon hikes will help participants get to know different places at the North Rim, with lots of time to pause and practice strategies from the morning’s workshop as they write along the trail.

A variety of after-dinner options include campfire story sharing, ranger talks (at both the NR Campground and Grand Canyon Lodge), and the final evening’s “reading to the canyon” during which participants gather in the glow of sunset to let their words fly over the canyon on the evening breeze.

The day before class: Sites at the North Rim Campground (included in the workshop registration fee) have been reserved for June 15-19 so that participants may arrive on June 15 and leave the morning of June 19.

NOTES ON FOOD AND LODGING:

Your instructor will be camping at the North Rim Campground with you—camping fees are included in the workshop registration; those who would like to stay at the Grand Canyon Lodge should make their own arrangements well in advance.

Participants will need provide their own tents and food; other dining options include the Grand Canyon Lodge dining room and adjacent Deli in the Pines, as well as the Camper Store next to the campground.

DAY 1

Morning workshop: meet at the camp site Ranger Kiosk at 9am. Topics include assembling the nature writer’s toolkit, using the five senses (and more) to pay attention, and making connections.

Afternoon hike/write along the Transept Trail: meet at the camp site at 1 pm for several hours of wandering toward the North Rim Lodge along this gentle rim trail full of wildflowers and canyon views, stopping to write along the way.

Evening options: After-dinner stroll to enjoy a golden sunset over nearby Transept Canyon; campfire story sharing.

DAY 2 (June 17)

Morning workshop: meet at the camp site at 9 am. Topics include big issues hidden in small small things, the element of surprise, and origin stories. Short hike/write options: Bright Angel Point or the beginning of the Widforss Trail.

Afternoon hike/write: meet at the camp site at 1 pm, then make the exceptionally scenic, 20-mile drive to Cape Royal. Hike/write options include: Cape Royal, Angel’s Window, Cliff Springs, Walhalla Ruins/Overlook.

Evening options: Sunset at Bright Angel Point and/or Grand Canyon Lodge ranger talk and/or campfire storytelling.

DAY 3 (June 18)

Morning workshop: meet at the camp site at 9 am. Topics include: Your “voice” and “style,” and how to combine those into artful story-telling.

The final day’s hiking adventure: we’ll take our lunches with us on a below-the-rim hike on the North Kaibab Trail. Participants will choose a distance they feel comfortable with; we will stop and write along the way.

Evening option: “Reading to the Canyon.” We will decide on a suitable location—perhaps Point Imperial, the highest viewpoint on the North Rim, where the west-facing cliffs of the Marble Platform glow ever more brilliant as the sun sets, then fade into purple shadow.

WHAT TO BRING:

- Writing tools: whatever you like to write in/on/with. (Bring back-ups as well.)
- Comfortable Clothes: temperatures may vary from the 50s to the 80s.
- Daypack: to carry writing tools, food, water, and extra layers.
- Water: at least 2 quarts capacity for day hikes.
- Snack food: to eat in the field to keep your metabolism enthusiastic.
- Lightweight portable camp chair, pad, or towel: for writing along the trail (or you can just find a friendly rock; there are plenty at the North Rim).
- A sense of humor: we will work hard not to take ourselves too seriously, even as we engage in some serious writing work.

ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Thea Gavin

A native of Orange, CA, where she hikes and writes about her local wildlands, Thea Gavin has enjoyed teaching creative writing at Concordia University Irvine since 1997. Always eager to keep learning, in

2004 she enrolled in a volunteer naturalist class, resulting in many rewarding hours since then leading writing hikes.

In 2011, Thea spent three life-changing weeks at the North Rim as National Park Service Artist-in-Residence; now she returns to Grand Canyon as often as possible to wander and write, both along and below the rim (and assisting with GCAFI hikes whenever she can work them into her busy grandmothering schedule). With an MA in teaching writing and an MFA in poetry, Thea has also studied nature writing in workshops led by Don Snow, Kim Stafford, Robert Michael Pyle, and Scott Russell Sanders over many years of attending Summer Fishtrap in Wallowa County, OR. Her poems and essays have appeared in a variety of chapbooks, journals, and anthologies, including *New Poets of the American West*; *On Foot: Grand Canyon Backpacking Stories*; and *Going Down Grand: Poems from the Canyon*. She is currently working on an anthology of place-based writing that highlights the natural history of Orange County, CA.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

(Please consider bringing an excerpt of writing from your own favorite nature writer to share.)

Edward Abbey. *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*. Ballantine Books, 1985.

Peter Anderson and Rick Kempa, editors. *Going Down Grand: Poems from the Canyon*. Lithic Press, 2015

Clarence Dutton. *The Tertiary History of the Grand Cañon District*. University of Arizona Press, 2001.

Lowell Jaeger, ed. *New Poets of the American West*. Many Voices Press, 2010.

Barry Lopez and Debra Gwartney, editors. *Home Ground: A Guide to the American Landscape*. Trinity University Press, 2013.

Richard Louv. *The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature Deficit Disorder*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2011.

Rick Kempa, ed. *On Foot: Grand Canyon Backpacking Stories*. Vishnu Temple Press, 2014.

Rick Kempa. *Ten Thousand Voices*. Littoral Press, 2013.

Bill McKibben, ed. *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*. Library of American, 2008.

Mark Tredinnick. *The Land's Wild Music: Encounters with Barry Lopez, Peter Matthiessen, Terry Tempest Williams, and James Galvin*. Trinity University Press, 2005.