

The Home Place by Drew Lanham

The passages below have been selected for what they may reveal about the author's perspective and personal experiences. Share some of these with your students and ask them how the writing made them feel, wonder about the writer, think about nature.

Short Reading samples:

I am a Man in Love With Nature. I am and Eco-addict, consuming everything that the outdoors offers in its all-you-can-sense, seasonal buffet. I am a wilding, born of forests and fields and more comfortable on unpaved back roads and winding woodland paths than in any place where concrete, asphalt, and crowds prevail. Pg. 3

I am as much a scientist as I am a black man: my skin defines me no more than my heart does. But somehow my color often casts my love affair with nature in shadow Being who and what I am doesn't fit the common calculus. I am the rare bird, the oddity: appreciated by some for my different perspective and discounted by others as an unnecessary nuisance, an unusually colored fish out of water. But in all my time wandering I've yet to have a single wild creature question my identity. Pg. 4

My colleagues and I have mostly done a poor job of reaching the hearts and minds of those who don't hold advanced degrees with an "ology" at the end. We take a multidimensional array of creatures, places, and interwoven lives and boil them down into the flat pages and prose of obscure journals most will never read. Those tomes are important – but the sin is in leaving the words to die there, pressed between the pages. As knowledge molders in the stacks, the public goes on largely uninformed about the wild beings and places that should matter to all of us. Pg. 5

But on that day I didn't get to Miss October. There was a new book on Jock's desk. Unlike the artsy, psychedelic covers that graced most of his novels, the jacket of this book was hardly colorful. Instead three honking Canada geese were beautifully but simply drawn in blue-green tones. The title was an odd one: A Sand Country something or other. Something about the book snared me, held me in a momentary place I wanted to be.

Before I got too deep into the woods, I might take a few minutes to lie in the pasture lane, enticing the "buzzards" to investigate. I lay as still as I could and did my best imitation of something stinking and dead....I felt closer to flight by bringing the birds nearer to my earthbound existence.

I launched myself from trees, roofs, and haystacks. No matter how hard I tried, though, I couldn't fly. Mary Poppins and Wile E. Coyote had lied to me. Umbrellas didn't float me gently to the ground and no matter how vigorously I flapped my cardboard wings, my husky weight fell back to earth...I was a carmel-colored Icarus with a hard head, persisting in the fantasy that flying was something I was meant to do.

I'm hoping that soon a black birder won't be a rare sighting. I'm hoping that at some point I'll see color sprinkled throughout a birding-festival crowd. I'm hoping for the day when young hotshot birders just happen to be black like me.

Craving change from academic lecturing, "I took a group of graduate students Warren Wilson, a small, "working hands," liberal arts college in the mountains of western North Carolina, to see the preeminent conservation biologist E.O. Wilson speak. I'm not star chaser but Dr. Wilson, a fellow southerner and naturlist, is a supernova, a once-in-a-generation mind whose ideas shine like the sun in the conservation world. He introduced the ideas of biodiversity and biophilia to the world. He's on par with Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson...

His voice, even amplified through a microphone, never rose above the quiet surge of a low-tide surf. Yet he was irresistibly compelling, magnetic. I was entranced. I looked around – everyone else was drawn in, too. There were nods of approval, and more than a few eyes glistened with tears. It was church like I'd never imagined it. There was no damnation or guilt, but simply a heart-felt plea to notice, nurture, and care.

After the talk, I approached Dr. Wilson to thank him for sharing his brilliance and to ask for an autograph. I don't recall much of what he said, but I do recall, the deepest, kindest gaze. It was a caring look that made me feel singular in a room full of admirers. In my book he drew a tiny ant alongside his signature.