

Reading *Island of the Blue Dolphins*: One Book as a Window into the Disciplines

Note: This sample university syllabus is adapted from one used for a University South Carolina Honors College seminar taught by Sara L. Schwebel. Participants ranged from first-year students to seniors, and were majoring in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. After completing the reading-intensive section of the course (below), students engaged in public history writing for the Channel Islands National Park subject site on *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. This syllabus could be used as the building block for a service learning experience that brings college students into elementary or middle school classrooms that are studying *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Alternatively, it could be used as a stand-alone seminar course (perhaps in an accelerated semester) with assessments tied to the assigned reading below, as well as to the classroom conversations they prompt.

Course Description

This reading-intensive Honors College seminar takes an interdisciplinary approach to studying one of the most widely taught works of US children's literature, Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960). The book is based on the story of a real person, a nineteenth-century California Indian (Nicoleño) whose life and community were disrupted by international maritime trade in furs and multinational policies of Indian removal. This so-called "Lone Woman" spent 18 years in relative isolation on her remote California island as a result. The story of the Lone Woman has fascinated the public since the early nineteenth century, as hundreds of newspaper accounts and scientific articles attest. In this seminar, students will gain the knowledge and skills to contextualize *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and the Lone Woman's life by reading deeply across three fields: nineteenth-century California and Pacific history (especially as it relates to native peoples and to the Northwest and China trades), children's literature criticism, and the archeology of the California Channel Islands.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, the successful student will be able to:

- Contextualize the publication and reception history of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, articulating the cultural work the book has (and is) performing
- Engage in thoughtful, informed debate about representations of indigenous people in American children's literature
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of early nineteenth-century California history
- Explain and apply the concept of settler colonialism
- Conduct effective close readings of primary sources, including attention to literary tropes
- Distinguish between the work of historians, literary scholars, and social scientists, and outline the benefits and challenges of engaging in interdisciplinary work

Required Reading

Three books have been ordered for purchase at the University Bookstore (*Island of the Blue Dolphins: The Complete Reader's Edition*, *Dear Miss Karana*, and *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers*). All other reading and media are available via the Lone Woman and Last Indians Digital Archive (LWLI), the Channel Islands National Park subject site on *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (CINP), the University's electronic books & journals collection, course e-reserves, and/or the world wide web.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Unit I: Karana and her Community / the Lone Woman and her People

Introduction: The Novel as a Starting Place

Class meetings: 2

Reading: Scott O'Dell, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960)

Island of the Blue Dolphins: Tracing the Literary Criticism

Class meetings: 3

Reading for day 1

- Jon C. Stott, "Narrative Technique and Meaning in *Island of the Blue Dolphins*," *Elementary English* 52 (1975): 442–46. (LWLI)
- Susan Naramore Maher, "Encountering Others: The Meeting of Cultures in Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *Sing Down the Moon*," *Children's Literature in Education* 23, no. 4 (1992): 215–27.

Reading for day 2

- C. Anita Tarr, "An Unintentional System of Gaps: A Phenomenological Reading of Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins*," *Children's Literature in Education* 28, no. 2 (1997): 61–71.
- Diann L. Baecker, "Surviving Rescue: A Feminist Reading of Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins*," *Children's Literature in Education* 38, no. 3 (2007): 195–206.

Reading for day 3

- Sara L. Schwebel, *Child-Sized History: Fictions of the Past in U.S. Classrooms* (Vanderbilt UP, 2011), chapter 2, "Indians Mythic and Human."
- Click through Debbie Reese's blog, "[American Indians in Children's Literature](#)."
- In class: examination of postwar children's picture books with problematic depictions of Native peoples and playing Indian. Examples: Madye Lee Chastain, *Let's Play Indian* (Wonder Books, 1950), Kathryn Hitte, *I'm an Indian Today* (Golden Press, 1961), Peggy Parish, *Let's Be Indians* (Harper & Row, 1962).

The Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island: Reading and Interpreting Early Accounts

Class meetings: 3

Reading for day 1

- Christopher Columbus: [first letter to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella \(1493\)](#)
- Oxford English Dictionary, chronological definitions of the word “Discover.”
Consider: how do historians use the term today? How do archeologists?

Reading for day 2

- George Nidever, *The Life and Adventures of George Nidever: A Pioneer in Cal. Since 1834* (1878) [skim early section; read entire section on the Lone Woman]. (LWLI)
- Carl Dittman, *Narrative of a Seafaring Life on the Coast of California* (1878). (LWLI)
- “A Female Crusoe,” *The Boston Atlas* (1847). (LWLI)
- Emma Hardacre, “Eighteen Years Alone: A Tale of the Pacific,” *Scribner’s Monthly* (1880). (LWLI)
- One additional Lone Woman “parent” document of your choice. (Go to “Browse by Document Group” on the LWLI archive and choose any parent.)
- [The Toki-Toki song](#)
- [DAR Plaque](#) at Mission Santa Barbara

Reading for day 3

- “Literary Tropes: Introduction” (LWLI)
- Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), introduction and chapter 3, “Marvelous Possessions.”

The Lone Woman: Reading/Viewing Contemporary Scholarship, Part I

Class meetings: 2

Reading/viewing for day 1

- Susan L. Morris et al., “Murder, Massacre, and Mayhem on the California Coast, 1814–1815,” *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (2014): 81–100.
- Watch *West of the West*, Episode 1, Tale #4 (“The Lone Woman”). Library reserve.
[~17 minutes]

Reading/viewing for day 2

- Susan L. Morris et al., “Nicoleños in Los Angeles: Documenting the Fate of the Lone Woman’s Community,” *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (2016): 91–118.
OR
- Susan L. Morris, “[New Discovery of Native Peoples of San Nicolas Island in 19th Century Los Angeles](#),” (~56 minutes)

The Lone Woman: Reading/Viewing Contemporary Scholarship, Part II

Class meetings: 2

Reading for day 1

- Marla Daily, “The Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island: A New Hypothesis on Her Origin,” *California History* 68, no. 1–2 (1989): 36–41, 65. (LWLI)

- Pamela Munro, "[Takic Foundations of Nicoleño Vocabulary](#)," *Proceedings of the Fifth California Islands Symposium*, March 29–April 1, 1999

Reading/viewing for day 2

- Jon M. Erlandson et al., "From the *Island of the Blue Dolphins*: A Unique Nineteenth-Century Cache Feature From San Nicolas Island, California," *The Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* 8, no. 1 (2013): 66–78.
- Jon M. Erlandson, "[Northwest Coast Artifacts from a Historic Nicoleño Cache Feature](#)," presentation at the Eighth California Island Symposium, 2012 (~13 minutes)
- **Optional:** Lisa Thomas-Barnett, "[A Time Capsule from the Past: A Redwood Box Cache from San Nicolas Island](#)," presentation at the Eighth California Island Symposium, 2012 (~16 minutes)

UNIT II: History as Context

Before American California: Missionaries and Merchants on the Coast

Class meetings: 5

Reading for days 1 & 2

- Kent G. Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers* (University of California Press, 2005).

Reading for day 3 & 4

- Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840). Available as ebook through Project Gutenberg.

Readings for day 5

- David Igler, "Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770–1850," *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (2004): 693–719.
- Jim Hardee, "Soft Gold: Animal Skins and the Early Economy of California," in *Studies in Pacific History: Economics, Politics, and Migration*, eds. Dennis O. Flynn et al. (Ashgate, 2002).

The United States and Settler Colonialism

Class meetings: 2–3

Reading for day 1/2

- Walter Hixon, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (Palgrave, 2013), introduction.
- Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.

Reading for day 2/3

- Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Palgrave, 2010), introduction.

Note: We will discuss in depth, including the complex case of Israel

American Indian Law & Its Consequences

Class meetings: 2–3

Reading for day 1

- Image analysis: *Amerigo Vespucci Rediscovered America; he called her once and thenceforth she was always awake* (in class)
- Excerpts: *Inter Caetera* (1493), *Johnson v. McIntosh*, 21 U.S. 543 (1823) [CINP, Teacher Resources section, HS lesson on Doctrine of Discovery]

Reading for day 2/3

- Bradley Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe* (Yale UP, 2016), chapters 5 & 6, “Legislating Exclusion and Vulnerability” and “Rise of the Killing Machine.”
- Carole Goldberg, “A Counterstory of Native American Persistence,” in *Island of the Blue Dolphins: The Complete Reader’s Edition* (University of California Press, 2016).

Anthropology in the Nineteenth Century & Today

Class meetings: 2

Reading for day 1

- Steven Conn, *History’s Shadow: Native North Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), chapter 4, “The Past is Underground.”
- Locate and be prepared to discuss at least one article in the Lone Woman and Last Indians Digital Archive that speaks to archaeology on San Nicolas Island. Note: *do not* search “archeology” to find an article! Be more creative—how might browsing by tropes be useful here?

Reading for day 2

- René L. Vellanoweth, “Archaeology, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, and the Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island,” in *Island of the Blue Dolphins: The Complete Reader’s Edition* (University of California Press, 2016).
- Lee M. Panich, “Archaeologies of Persistence: Reconsidering the Legacies of Colonialism in Native North America,” *American Antiquity* 78, no. 1 (2013): 105–22.

Revisiting *Island of the Blue Dolphins*

Class meetings: 4–5

Reading for day 1

- Sara L. Schwebel, *Island of the Blue Dolphins: The Complete Reader’s Edition* (University of California Press, 2016), introduction & composition history, pages 1–94.

Reading for day 2

- Phillip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (Yale UP, 1998), introduction.
- Phillip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (UP of Kansas, 2004), chapter 2, “Representation.”

Viewing for day 3

- Universal's adaption of *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1964). Library reserve.
- In class: Examine promotional material from film, on CINP.

Reading for day 4/5

Reading:

- Reread Scott O'Dell, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*
- Eric Elliot, [*Dear Miss Karana*](#) (Heyday, 2016)
- In class: Examine children's picture books incorporating indigenous languages.

UNIT III: Application

Service learning in local elementary or middle school and/or public history writing activities