

# PHILLIPS EXETER ACADEMY

## ENVIRONMENTAL LITERATURE INSTITUTE Participant Feedback 2016-2019

In my 7 or so years of teaching, ELI does for me what no other professional development has been able to accomplish. It spurs my creativity and re-ignites my passion. It makes me a better teacher, relationship builder, and community member. It helps me create curriculum and bounce ideas off of others. But, the most important thing is that ELI is really a community committed to doing hard and difficult work, wicked work with huge, seemingly unsolvable problems. We do it together, and it is invigorating and full of hope. This is what I seek as an educator, and ELI immerses me in it.

**Kristin Saba Fisher Swiss Semester; UM New England Literature Program**

I am leaving ELI with a renewed commitment to bring environmental justice into my classroom and a need to instill a sense of environmental and social stewardship in my students. The conference left me feeling refreshed to know that peers in other schools have similar concerns about environmental justice and sustainable practices in their communities. I feel we as educators have the power to hold our institutions and administrations responsible to commit to building climate change-responsive and sustainably-minded curriculum and culture.

**Rochelle Devault, San Francisco University High School**

As a science teacher, I found this experience to be really enriching. It offers a different perspective when talking about climate change and environmental justice that I hadn't been able to reach yet. The conference speaks to the human aspects of what it means to be dealing with these issues and gave me a fantastic insight into how I can bring these approaches into my science classroom. The abundance of insight and knowledge in the room was energizing and gave me the spark to build a great philosophy for my class next year. Thank you!

**Mike DiPietro, Southridge School, British Columbia**

When I was a kid, I loved going to sports camps, where everyone around me was focused on enjoying a sport, and helping me grow in the sport as I did my little part to help them grow, too. This is that for teachers interested in the environment and, more specifically, in teaching climate change. It is a place to share, to borrow, to brainstorm, to grow. I feel like I will return to my school knowing this community-- here at ELI--has my back.

**Adam Ruderman, Chadwick School, Los Angeles**

ELI cultivates a great sense of community around environmental literature and environmental studies. I was delighted by the collaborative ethos of the group and the generosity of all the participants. And I learned a ton!

**Nick Matlin, Tower Hill School, Wilmington, DE**

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I have attended ELI for two years and it has transformed not only many of my classroom practices but also how I approach questions of environmental justice and climate change in the English classroom. I would recommend this for anybody who is looking for an intellectually engaging week with a tight-knit community of teachers, writers, and scholars interested in the environmental humanities!

**Nick Matlin, Tower Hill School, Wilmington, DE**

As a scientist and interdisciplinary scholar, I really appreciated the opportunity to learn how humanists think about current environmental crises. I came away with great books and perspectives to deepen my engagement. The community that arose at ELI broadened my own perspectives on epistemology and built a cohort that I can call upon to think through new curriculum.

**Brandon Kraft, The Spence School, New York, NY**

ELI is an extremely valuable professional development experience. I could come back year after year after year, and learn something new every time. It is a nurturing, open, authentic learning environment, creating community as well as augmenting curricula. I'm so grateful for this experience, and I wish it was accessible to a more diverse group of teachers from a more diverse group of schools.

**Susee Witt (3x ELI attendee!), San Francisco University High School**

I came to ELI hoping to gain information for an upcoming research project (while on sabbatical) and I walked away with much more. Entering into the Institute I had a fairly narrow view of my role as an educator in this field, and, honestly, I have gained a new view on my approach to my work. Thank you!

**Kara Sullivan, Oyster River High School**

I have been looking for authentic ways to incorporate experiential learning in my English classroom. The issue has always been--experience what? Now, I see that environmental literature and the environmental justice lens can be applied to my current curriculum and can expand my curriculum--an easy and important shift in perspective for me and my students. I really appreciate the ELI conference model because it is unlike many other educational conferences and professional development experiences that offer scattered, inchoate, and therefore unsatisfactory learning. ELI focuses on one topic, explores that topic deeply and widely, offers points of view about and experts in various aspects of the field, and resources to be used later for reflection. I like the interdisciplinary nature of the program offerings and seeing the interconnectedness of science and art--something I can bring back and apply at my own school and in my own class.

**Kate Gay, University School of Milwaukee**

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ELI provided a unique, productive, and relevant model for working with students on environmental themes and topics, providing educators with the tools and resources necessary for helping students incorporate strong environmental values into their role as citizens of the communities they are in. I'd highly recommend it to other educators.

**Chelsea Steinauer-Scudder, Writer**

This week was very transformative for me. I went in completely ignorant to what environmental literature was and was slightly intimidated to be thrust into an academic setting like this. However, I quickly discovered that those who were knowledgeable were more than willing to share their ideas. Everyone seemed to share the same sense of passion about the environment and teaching which was refreshing. I left here with a new vigor for teaching and excited to incorporate some of the new ideas I learned.

**Lindsey Barton, Waite High School, Toledo, Ohio**

It was invaluable to be able to work with 20 some odd other educators from around the country this week. I came in with the hope that I would learn about what others were doing in their classroom in order to bring back ideas and gain inspiration for my school. I am tasked this summer with a colleague to work on sustainable curriculum for our school. Topics and ideas that we discussed this week will be directly implemented in that work. It was amazing to be with people who are doing all kinds of different work who were so willing to share ideas. But, it was also a refreshing week in the sense that I gained the knowledge that my school is not totally off the mark. We are making progress on pulling these topics into our curriculum and school culture. It took being with people from other places to help me see that. ELI has given me inspiration for future projects but also affirmation that we are on the right path.

**Ronnie Vasnaver, The Pennington School**

Participating in the ELI course has been the boost of inspiration I needed. With such wise leaders and passionate participants, it's no wonder I'm leaving the week feeling like I just spent a month with mentors and friends.

**Sophie Robinson '07, Phillips Exeter Academy**

I just love the ways in which you provide space for everyone in this program to connect, to work, and to play alongside one another. I felt like I was being taught by every single person that came to ELI, and I felt so affirmed too.

**Charley Mull, Worcester Academy (3x ELI participant!)**

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It's no small feat to get me excited for the coming school year in June, but the ELI program has me raring to go! The morning classes and afternoon cross pollination sessions had my brain sparking with new ideas for designing and reframing units in my freshman and senior English classes. Even though I do not teach an Environmental Literature course, every session in this program gave me new ideas and approaches to what and how I teach. The wisdom and compassion of the leaders and instructors create a space that welcomes all kinds of ideas and contributions. You really feel connected to the content and your peers in this course, and come out inspired and energized for the year ahead.

**Mike Spencer, English Teacher; Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall School; Waltham, MA**

I have been teaching at low-opportunity schools for 5 years now, with really limited resources and access to professional development. ELI re-invigorated my commitment to teaching and the environment. Being able to be a part of an intentional community that share resources, passions, failures, thoughts, reflections, in a safe and rigorous space is really what I need every year to serve my students best. I am so grateful for this experience. THANK YOU!

**Kristin Fischer, Swiss Semester and University of Michigan New England Literature Program**

I left ELI with a renewed commitment to environmental education and a powerful sense of hope and purpose.

**Dan Platt, Graceland University**

Through inspirational workshops on environmental justice and natural history and through thought-provoking conversations with fellow educators, I had a wonderfully valuable experience. I plan to encourage more of my Deerfield colleagues to attend the conference next year!

**Karinne Heise, Deerfield Academy**

The ELI is an indispensable resource for educators who are new to the genre and looking to explore texts and develop relationships with experts in the field. I am coming away with a wealth of information and experiences to share with my students.

**Meredith Durkee, Northfield Mount Hermon**

Although ELI is about the relationship between words and the environment, words can not describe the changes that take place during the week long experience. In so many ways, ELI has been the most profound endeavor in my development as an Environmental Educator.

**Brent Deisher, Morristown Beard School, NJ**

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I thought promoting and building community was one of the highlights of this conference. I really appreciated the way the institute allowed space for becoming friends with people, both leaders and participants, who we only knew for a few days, and for a continual and open exchange of ideas among the group. I am going home with pages of notes on EL-related ideas for classroom practice, suggestions for resources, personal reflections, and contact info for continuing conversations.

**Julia Woodward, English Teacher; Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall School; Waltham, MA**

I came to ELI looking to bolster a unit on Creative Non-Fiction and I'm leaving with a plan to overhaul my entire year, putting environmental issues at the center of it! I've learned so much--about environmental issues, about creative teaching, and about meaningful approaches to this critical area of education! It was a great week! Thanks to you all!

**Ron King, Heronfield Academy, New Hampshire**

This week at ELI was transformative to my work as a teacher. It opened me to so many new ways of seeing and interacting with literature, not only within the diverse field of environmental literature, but also in how so many of the fertile and emergent ideas can be applied to texts I already teach. I am grateful to the dynamic team of leaders and workshop facilitators for the various modes of discussion and cross pollination they fostered. I leave with an exceptionally rich trove of resources to mine as I reconfigure existing units and dream of new classes to create, as well as an extensive and diverse network of educators I can continue to learn from. I heartily recommend this institute to any teacher of literature, life or environmental science, or anyone hoping to foster intellectual and emotional connections to the natural world, in all the forms it takes in our lives.

**Jon Phinney, English Teacher, Dublin School**

Stephen said it best: ELI is a space of healing. The creative energy, the focus on community, the ability to pair the intellectual with the emotional makes this a space I want to return to year after year.

ELI reinvigorated my thirst for being a student of both literature and teaching.

**Sam Morris, Deerfield Academy**

ELI was a wonderful opportunity to collaborate with and learn from a wide variety of passionate and skilled professionals. This is an incredibly valuable opportunity for teachers who are passionate about the environment, however they might define it.

**Anonymous**

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*Being part of ELI was one of the highlights of my professional life. The workshop facilitators and presenters are experts in their disciplines and having the opportunity to work directly with them in the classroom and the field was incredibly inspiring. It was also affirming to meet and collaborate with like-minded passionate teachers who generously shared their expertise, classroom experiences, and materials. I learned so much and I can't wait to share these resources with my colleagues and students. I am looking forward to continuing to work with these incredible teachers throughout the school-year and to sharing my best practices in reading, writing, and thinking about nature, the environment, and my love of place.*

**Carol McGill, Weldon E. Howitt Middle School, Farmingdale, New York**

*Thank you so much for supporting and hosting the Environmental Literature Institute. The instructors that you support with this program are some of the most thoughtful and forward-thinking educators I've ever met. Exeter should be so proud to have provided time, space and resources to nurture the work of this timely, politically relevant and interdisciplinary field. It was a joy and privilege to mine it's rich history and use what we found to design deeply relevant curricula for the next generation of environmental thinkers, writers and activists.*

**Eben Bein, Codman Academy**

*Attending ELI provided me with the chance to develop curriculum and specific activities to support what my school already does well. The resources, discussions, and world-class speakers formed a rich, inspiring learning community. I am energized by this professional development opportunity and can't wait to implement my learnings on upcoming courses.*

**Nate Meltzer, National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS)**

*ELI was an incredibly enlightening and energizing professional development experience! Working with teachers and scholars helped me better develop my teaching of environmental history and literature, and I learned practical activities that I will use in the coming year. I was also moved by the incredible work being done by so many of colleagues.*

**Anonymous**

*ELI has broadened me both professionally and personally. I feel alive and excited about how I can both bring nature into the classroom as a valid, important, and necessary character but also about how I can get my students out in nature -- and not just in it, but to recognize that they are part of nature, and that nature is part of them. This Institute has been the best professional development experience in my 14 years of teaching. This is relevant, real, and meaningful for me as a teacher and as a human being. I have learned so much and will continue to collaborate with these teachers and friends I have found at ELI. This truly embodied what a learning community is all about. GRATITUDE ABOUND!*

**Carter Thomas, Westminster Schools Atlanta, GA**

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*ELI was, without a doubt, the most intellectually and personally fulfilling professional development experience I've ever had. Our world is changing, and our teaching has to keep pace if we are going to position our students to thrive. ELI gave me both theoretical grounding and practical methods for updating my curriculum, as well as the sense of community to do so with energy and hope.*

**Clark Meyer, Westminster Schools Atlanta, GA**

*I can tell you right now that PEA and ELI are amazing and completely different from anything that happens in the world of public schools. The experiences that I had at ELI are going to change the way that I think and teach. Your hard work, Jason, will make its way to all 125 of my the students that I have in class this year as well as all of the students that I have in future years. I am grateful!*

**Kelli Krieger**

*So much of professional development is rooted in the abstract—a collection of ideas and shared thinking—whereas ELI is grounded in doing the work necessary to bridge ideas into activism both for teachers and students alike.*

**Ed Kloman, Pingree School**

*The Harkness table discussion format facilitated productive, inclusive conversations, and served as a model for engaged discourse in the classroom. I enjoyed and appreciated the warm-up activities / ice breakers too.*

**Yuki Basso, Iolani School**

*A fantastic lens through which to better understand history and a great way to prepare deeper, more meaning inter-disciplinary courses. Easily the best professional development course I have done.*

**Noah Clarke, History Instructor, Shore Country Day School, Beverly, MA**

*After a great week of laughter and deep-thinking, this conference has connected me to a passionate learning community. I leave this conference with friends who will double as great resources for me as I plan and improve my courses. From ELI, you will emerge inspired by other teachers, you will be sitting at the table with heroes of the field, and you be reminded that teaching is one of the greatest ways to effect change and to improve the world around us.*

**Katie Forrestal, Vail Mountain School, Vail, CO**

*I recommend ELI to college faculty who are interested in transforming their courses in the environmental humanities. While specifically targeted to teachers at independent schools, ELI provides an opportunity to not only learn from the best thinkers in the discipline, but also apply that knowledge in the classroom. ELI is an amazing, positive, and productive experience which will energize both your teaching and scholarship.*

*The Environmental Lit Institute at Exeter was the best professional development I have experienced. I felt challenged and engaged by the people, materials, and discussions.*

**Dan Provost, Exeter High School, Exeter, New Hampshire**

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*The ELI was, hands down, one of the best teaching workshops I have attended. I left feeling re-charged, and energized to integrate all that I learned into my classes next year. Being around educators who share my passions was an invaluable and reassuring experience, and the inspiring workshop leaders and speakers all provided different lenses with which to view literature and the environment. The multiple settings of our workshop activities also provided concrete models of how to integrate the outdoors into my humanities courses. I came away with both big-picture ideas about my teaching practice, as well as lists of assignments, activities, and texts that I'd like to use in my classroom. I look forward to staying in touch with the community of teachers I met this past week, and to sharing our experiences throughout the year. A remarkable and unforgettable week!*

**Christie Beveridge, Vermont Commons School**

*I had no idea how inspiring and stimulating ELI would be; I left the week not only with a whole crew of new friends and connections, but also armed with immediately applicable pedagogical ideas and a strong philosophical framework to bring back to my students and my school. It was a transformative experience--one that I will draw on for a long time to come.*

**Susee Witt, The Branson School, Marin County, CA**

*Participating in ELI has been an engaging, worthwhile experience. As much for the educator as for the curious learner, ELI provided me with the means to both prepare for my classes and rediscover a love of the natural world.*

*I highly recommend this institute for any educator who feels alone in advocating for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the environment. As an interdisciplinary teacher myself, it was both a relief and an encouragement to find colleagues with similar curricular goals. I have been inspired by their passion and commitment to the study of Environmental Literature, and I plan to incorporate some of the essays and nonfiction writing I have encountered into my environmental studies course this year.*

*ELI exposed me to a panoply of materials and resources that I otherwise would not have encountered, and which will prove to be essential in the redesign of my course. The people there -- workshop leaders, speakers, and other conference attendees -- were an invaluable source of information and support, and provided expert advice on new ways to approach environmental studies.*

**Arianna Vailas, Belmont Hill School**