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The Anthropocene Reviewed

John Green

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The University of Mississippi Common Reading Experience Resource Guide

Integrating
The Anthropocene Reviewed
into the Classroom

EDHE
Library
Writing and Rhetoric
Faculty and Staff
2022-2023

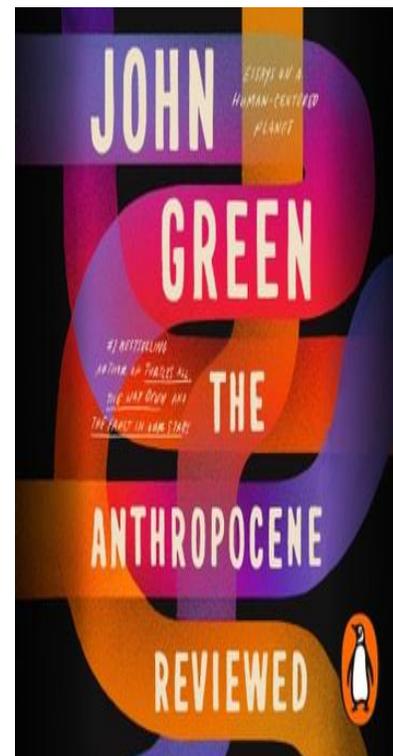


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Chapter 1: Using *The Anthropocene Reviewed* in the Classroom

Why does UM have a Common Reading Experience Program?

The Common Reading Experience is a shared intellectual event for new members of the UM community. Through reading and considering a common book, new students engage with each other and UM faculty in exploring issues relevant to today's global community. The Common Reading Experience helps students understand the expectations of college-level academic work, the nature of scholarly inquiry, and the values of an academic community. The program also enriches new students' campus experiences through co-curricular programs and events related to the book. The Common Reading Text is used in EDHE classes, Writing 100/101 classes, and other classes on campus. For more information about the Common Reading Experience visit <http://umreads.olemiss.edu/>.

What are the Common Reading Experience student learning outcomes?

By reading, writing, and learning together through the shared venture of the UM Common Reading Experience, students:

- Develop critical thinking, reading, writing, and research skills and abilities
- Gain an emerging sense of confidence as learners, thinkers, readers, and writers
- Develop a sense of community among peers, neighbors, and instructors
- Develop connections among ideas, experiences, disciplines, and academic and personal goals
- Relate the issues raised by the common book to their lives as new or returning students.

Why was *The Anthropocene Reviewed* selected?

The Anthropocene Reviewed is a collection of personal essays evaluating various artifacts from the [Anthropocene](#) era, the proposed name for the current geologic period when human activity has been the dominant force on the planet. Green's essays skillfully connect personal experience with the social, cultural, and environmental concerns of our age. The book is adapted from his [podcast](#) of the same name. *The Anthropocene Reviewed* won the Goodreads Choice for Non-Fiction 2021 award.

Who is John Green?

John Green is a well-known writer of young adult fiction. His novels include *Looking for Alaska*; *An Abundance of Katherines*; *Paper Towns*; *The Fault in Our Stars*; *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*; and *Turtles All the Way Down*. *The Anthropocene Reviewed* is his first non-fiction book. His work has been honored with a Printz Medal, a Printz Honor, and an Edgar Award, and several of his novels have been adapted into feature films. He and his brother co-host several online video projects, including [Vlogbrothers](#); [Crash Course](#); and the charity venture, [Project for Awesome](#). He lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, with his wife and children.

How do I teach non-fiction?

The Common Reading Experience provides students and teachers in all disciplines a chance to interact with a shared text. Critical analysis of texts may feel like foreign territory to some teachers; however, analysis is a skill that is useful in all areas of education and beyond and can be approached in ways with which teachers are comfortable. Writing classes use the common reading text as the basis of a major project, but work with the book in other classes does not need to be so in-depth or take up entire class periods. Try to implement short in-class discussions, homework assignments, response papers, or journal writings using the themes and prompts listed in this guide. Or ask students to examine the choices Green makes as a writer (style, structure, vocabulary, etc.) and how they impact us as readers. Remember that you can concentrate on a few essays that relate specifically to the themes of your course. This resource guide should provide starting points for discussions, homework, and/or writing assignments that will challenge students.

How do I encourage students to read?

Before assigning reading:

- Preview *The Anthropocene Reviewed* with students. Introduce the book during class. Explain how the book will be used in the course and how it will help students meet learning outcomes. Share your own excitement about the book, perhaps describing some favorite passages, events, or people.
- Help students understand the depth of reading required. Display a passage, and model critical reading strategies such as text annotation and marginalia.

As students read:

- Provide focused questions for students to consider while they are reading. Ask them to respond to those questions in writing before the next class.

- Have students identify and submit a discussion topic or question via email or Blackboard after they have read an assignment but before the next class meeting. Use their topics and questions as the basis for class activities.
- Require students to keep a reading response journal in which they comment on or question the reading assignment.
- Ask students to underline/highlight several passages from a reading assignment. In class, ask students to discuss one of their underlined/highlighted passages.

After students have read:

- Use class time and activities to build on, rather than summarize, the reading assignment.
- At the start of class, assign a one-minute paper in which students identify both the most crucial part of the reading assignment and an unanswered question they have about the reading assignment.
- During the first few minutes of class, ask students to write about links between the reading assignment and the topic being discussed in class.
- Distribute one or two questions that build on the reading assignment. Use the think-pair-share protocol. Students first consider the question(s) on their own. Then they discuss the question(s) with a partner. Finally, they share their results with the class.

How do I lead a class discussion?

A good class discussion, like any part of teaching, should be structured yet open to improvisation. Following are some pointers for leading a discussion based on what students have read (or even their attendance at an event).

Preparation before the class meeting:

Though you may have already read the essays, be sure to review what the students are reading for your class meeting. Make a list of what you would like your students to learn from this exercise in order of importance.

- For instance, you might prioritize that students understand what they read.
- Then you might select a couple of scenes or events in the book that seem important or interesting (or even puzzling – just because you are leading class discussion does not mean you need to have all the possible answers).
- Perhaps you have selected several themes in the essays as your focus. You might choose scenes that relate to pop culture, mental health, or the natural world.
- You might also ask students to respond to a specific quotation or passage.
- Jot down a few notes so you can access them easily during your class discussion.
- Annotate your own text.

Class time:

- Establish respect. Class discussion is a time for exploration, and the classroom is a safe environment for students to say what they are thinking. Remind students of the first rule of the University creed: “I believe in respect for the dignity of each person.” Be sure students are listening carefully to each speaker and taking his or her ideas seriously.
- Before discussion, ask students to reflect on a directed, yet open, question in a five- to ten-minute writing. Encourage students to keep writing throughout the allotted time even if they run out of things to say. They will surprise themselves with this unstructured writing. This writing is not a quiz with one correct answer. Ask them questions such as “What do you think is the significance of X?”; “How has X changed over time?”; “Why did X do what he or she did?” You could also ask them to do a close reading of a particular passage, perhaps even comparing it to another passage.
- Avoid general questions such as “What did you think of the reading for today?” or “What did you find interesting?” These can be dead-end questions that will lead to short discussions.
- To mix things up, you may also have them work together in small groups to find discussion starters or answers to your questions.

Other ideas and approaches:

- Different classes have different personalities. Just make sure the environment in which students speak is a safe one, and continue to encourage discussion in different ways if something is not working.
- Some students will direct their comments just to you. Encourage them to talk to each other.
- If you had them write a response, invite students to share what they wrote.
- If you had them work in groups, invite representatives from each group to share what they found.
- Encourage students to point to specifics in the text. Ask them where they see what they see.
- Invite students to read sections out loud.
- Be open to where the conversation takes you. Sometimes students will pick up on details that you didn’t see.
- Try not to let the class discussion go over fifteen to twenty minutes. Students are most productive in that time frame.
- At the end of the discussion, recap the major points made or ask students to do so.
- Course-specific discussion prompts are included in the course-specific sections of this guide.

How do I deal with controversial topics?

Some issues in *The Anthropocene Reviewed* may spark controversy in the classroom. Issues that may generate controversy include but are not limited to climate change, misinformation, and mental health. The Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning's [Teaching Controversial Topics](#) can help you consider different approaches to discussing these issues.

Remember that the common read discussion should always serve your course outcomes. If a student raises an issue with which you have no expertise or are uncomfortable tackling, you might respond by explaining the topic is more suited for discussion in a different course (such as English, Sociology, or Political Science). For example, you might say, “[Controversy X] is an important issue, and it’s one that you can study in depth in [Course Y]. [Course Y] is taught by an expert in that field. For the purposes of this course, let’s keep the focus on [your course outcome Z].” Additional guidelines are below.

If a student raises a controversial issue unexpectedly, you may want to:

1. Acknowledge the student’s remark.
2. Acknowledge that other students may hold different views or positions.
3. Assess your willingness to continue the discussion further.
4. Assess other students’ willingness to continue the discussion further.

The following guidelines may be helpful for facilitating planned discussions of controversial issues:

1. Articulate a clear purpose for the discussion (for example, how the discussion is related to course objectives).
2. Establish ground rules, such as listening without interrupting the speaker, questioning ideas rather than criticizing individuals, offering at least one piece of evidence to support each point made, using “I” statements rather than “you” statements.
3. Be an active facilitator by redirecting students who are off topic or participating too actively, ensuring students are not put on the spot as spokespersons for certain groups, providing opportunities for all students to participate (orally or through writing), and being attuned to students’ emotions.
4. Summarize the discussion at the end of class and obtain student feedback.

How do I build instruction around the essays' themes?

The essays weave many themes: risk and uncertainty, natural wonders, human impact on the planet, powers of observation, family ties, the value of art, mental health, wellbeing, and others.

1. A class focusing on the theme of human impact on the planet might look like this:
 - a. Individually, students identify and write about a passage that illustrates the theme of human impact on the planet. (five to seven minutes)
 - b. As a class, students discuss the passages they have chosen. (ten to fifteen minutes)
 - c. With partners, students list why human impact on the planet is important to individuals, communities, and the world. (five to ten minutes)
 - d. Student pairs report their findings to the entire class. (ten to fifteen minutes)
 - e. Homework: Students write a personal appreciation of a place substantially impacted by humans. It could be somewhere in their hometowns, a place on campus, an area they have visited, etc. After describing why the place has personal value for them, students should discuss the value of that spot to the larger community.

What library resources are available?

Visit the [UM Libraries Common Reading Research Guide](#). Explore this website about *The Anthropocene Reviewed* featuring information about the author and book, upcoming events, podcasts and books by John Green, and more.

Where can students find extra copies of the book?

The J.D. Williams Library has two electronic copies of [The Anthropocene Reviewed](#) available for checkout by clicking on either the EBSCOhost link or Proquest Ebook Central link. Students can also find these books by entering the book title into the One Search box on the library's homepage. Students use their UM WebID and password to log into library databases to download or view ebooks. Electronic copies can be checked out anytime, but are limited to one user at a time. However, they can be downloaded and viewed for 24 hours on a single device, which should help free up usage. There is also a print copy of the book in the main stacks that students can check out using this call number: [HM621.G735 2021](#). A copy of all Common Read titles are available in Archives & Special Collections (but these can only be viewed inside the library). Finally, one copy of the book is available for one-day checkout at the Reserve Desk under the instructor name: Melissa Dennis, Course: EDHE 105. If anyone needs help with finding books or finding other library materials for the Common Read, please email Melissa Dennis at mdennis@olemiss.edu.

What events or speakers are being planned for the fall semester?

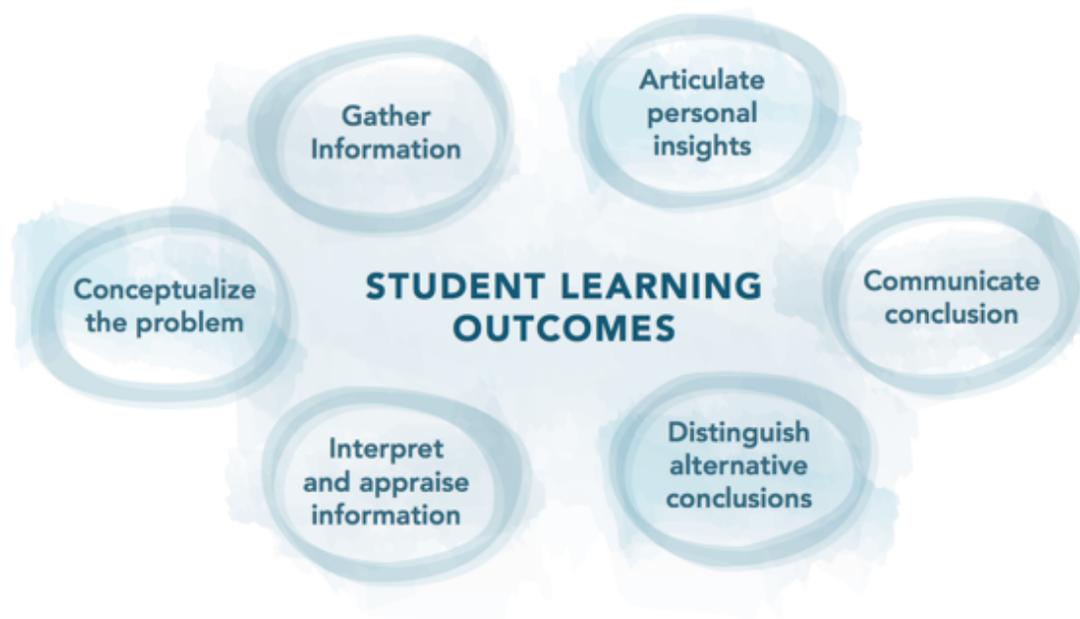
Thought-provoking events are an excellent way to get students involved with the book outside of the classroom. Please consider encouraging your students to attend an event and reflect on the overall message being delivered. For the most up-to-date list, visit the [UM Libraries Common Reading Research Guide](#).

What if one of my students has a disability and needs a copy of the book in a different format?

Students with disabilities should visit Student Disability Services in 234 Martindale as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester. SDS provides classroom accommodations to all students on campus who disclose a disability, request accommodations, and meet eligibility requirements. SDS will be able to help your student acquire a copy of the CRE book in an appropriate format. The SDS website, <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/sds/SDSFaculty.htm>, has some helpful resources for instructors.

Chapter 2: *The Anthropocene Reviewed* Critical Thinking Exercises

The UM QEP, *Think Forward*, defines critical thinking as the ability to conceptualize problems, gather pertinent information, interpret data, appraise evidence, distinguish diverse points of view, and articulate personal insights in order to present reasonable and effective arguments, responses, or conclusions.



(Diagram from *Think Forward Quality Enhancement Plan*)

These small group exercises may help students develop critical thinking skills.

1. Green references etymology, directly and indirectly, often in *The Anthropocene Reviewed*. Some of the words he examines are difficult, such as “graupel” (217). Others are more common words that most people wouldn’t look up or research, such as “believe” (254). Why is Green interested in etymology? Why can it be valuable to research commonly used words such as “believe”? In small groups, select a review from the book and read it together. Then, decide on two-three words to examine more closely. You might choose one difficult word and one more common word to research. Look up the etymology of your chosen words, and then discuss what you discovered. Make an argument in which you cover your findings, including what you learned and how the work helps your understanding of language and communication.

2. Many sites, such as YouTube, Google, and Facebook, have switched to a thumbs up or thumbs down feature rather than a five-star scale for users to rate content. What are the benefits and drawbacks of the five-star scale that Green uses for his reviews in *The Anthropocene Reviewed* and that are so common online and in publications? In small groups, discuss the different formats for reviews. Then, select a site that features reviewable content and analyze its rating feature. Does the site use stars, thumbs up/down, or something else? What is effective and ineffective about the format the site uses? Does the format limit or enhance the opportunity to leave written feedback, and why does this matter? Make an argument about the format your chosen site uses and why it works well or could be more effective.

3. The Anthropocene era is often characterized as a doomsday scenario with little hope for recovery or adaptation. In a [CNN interview](#), John Green explains he wrote *The Anthropocene Reviewed* as a “way to write myself back toward hope.” Similarly, some scientists and climate activists are trying to reframe the era as hopeful. Watch natural resource scientist Elena Bennett’s address to the World Economic Forum, “[Identifying Successful Socio-Ecological Initiatives](#),” and visit the website she has helped to develop, [Seeds of Good Anthropocenes](#). Divide into groups and use the site’s interactive map to choose one of the organizations identified as a seed. Do a little research on the organization and then answer the following questions.

1. What issue is this organization working on, and why is it a problem?
2. Who is affected by this problem?
3. What is the organization doing to resolve the problem?
4. What data does the organization provide to suggest the resolution efforts are working?
5. What’s your evaluation of their efforts? Will this organization make a difference?
6. Can we build a “good” Anthropocene? Are you hopeful? Why?

4. Green’s review “Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance” contains some deep thinking about photos and how we view them differently over time. In the case of the titular photo in the review, the young men were soon to go off to war where one of them would die and the other two would be wounded. Green also recalls a photo of his friends and their children all huddled together with his family in the weeks before COVID-19 changed the way most people interacted. Read over the review as a class, and then divide into small groups. Each group should choose one of the following photos to examine:



Photo courtesy of Mike Horan

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/september-11-remembered/2011-09-05/the-day-before-the-storm-september-10-2001-photos/2870854>



Photo by Rusty Costanza, AP (February 25, 2020)

<https://www.insider.com/photos-from-one-year-ago-show-just-how-much-has-changed-2021#hundreds-of-thousands-of-people-traveled-to-and-from-new-orleans-for-mardi-gras-last-february-2>

Now, discuss the following questions:

- What does the photo make you think and feel? Why?
- What are the purposes of photos?
- What do you take photos of? Why?
- Why does Green quote Kurt Vonnegut’s words “[h]istory is merely a list of surprises” in the review?
- Is Green correct that how we view a photo changes over time? Why or why not? Why does this matter in understanding ourselves and what we choose to document?

5. To encourage readers to think about what we value and why, Green begins “Kentucky Bluegrass” with a scenario of aliens asking why humans worship verdant lawns. This opener is a variation of the “tour guide for an alien” critical thinking exercise. As a class, read over Green’s scenario (165) and discuss its effectiveness as an opener for the essay. Then divide into small groups and try out the exercise for yourself by following the directions below (adapted from ThoughtCo):

Your group is conducting a tour for aliens visiting earth to observe human life. As you ride along in a blimp, viewing the landscape below, you float over the Grove and Vaught-Hemingway stadium on game day. One of the aliens looks down and is confused. You explain that an SEC football game is in progress. The alien asks several important questions: What’s a game? What’s a team? Why are the teams in divisions? Why are there no female players? Why do people get so excited watching other people play games? Why can’t the people in the seats go on the field and join in? Why are people sitting in the Grove in tents?

With your group members, try to answer the questions as fully as possible. Share your group’s answers with the class and then discuss the assumptions and values that underlie the answers. Why do humans value sports? Why do we support a certain team? Why do we insist on winners and losers? Why are we fascinated with elite athletes? Why do we tailgate?

Chapter 3: CRE Community of Voices Essay

An Essay Challenge Connecting Diverse Ideas, Experiences, Disciplines, and People

The Creed characterizes the University of Mississippi as “a community of learning dedicated to nurturing excellence in intellectual inquiry and personal character in an open and diverse environment.” As part of that mission, the UM Common Reading Experience helps students develop a sense of community among diverse peers, neighbors, and instructors, while making connections across varied ideas, experiences, and disciplines. The CRE Diverse Voices Essay Challenge provides an opportunity for students to further engage with that mission by examining issues related to the common book. Below are some of the essay details and the web address for additional information and submission:

- The annual challenge is open to all UM undergraduate students.
- One winner and two finalists will be chosen by a panel of judges.
- The winner will receive \$400.
- Entries must be submitted through the online submission portal.
- The deadline to submit is Dec. 31, 2022, with the winners and finalists announced in early 2023.
- For additional information and submission, visit the DWR Awards webpage at <https://rhetoric.olemiss.edu/awards/>.

Fall 2022 Prompt

In *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, Green features the review “CNN” in which he recalls watching coverage of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. At one point, the camera focused on a house featuring graffiti in Arabic while the reporter spoke of the “anger in the street, and the hatred” (132). Green’s roommate Hassan, who spoke Arabic, began to laugh because the graffiti spelled out “Happy birthday, sir, despite the circumstances” (132). Green gives CNN just two stars, but the message about news services and human communication stretches more broadly than just that network. Re-read the review, and consider why many people would assume that the graffiti spelled out something negative or hateful. What is Green saying about communication, a global community, and understanding others? Later in the review, Green writes, “I imagine lives that feel different from mine monolithically” (132). What does he mean here, and how does it apply to us all as people who share the planet? What are the benefits of understanding others who differ from us? What are the complications? What does Green want readers to think about at the individual level? Compose a thesis-driven essay in which you examine Green’s intent and make an argument about community and understanding. Be sure to cite the text.

Chapter 4: Integrating *The Anthropocene Reviewed* into EDHE 105/305

The common reading book selection is used each year in EDHE 105/305 courses primarily as a framework for class discussions, projects, and writing assignments that explore social themes and/or issues from the book. EDHE 105/305 instructors use the text (with a focus on those themes and issues) to teach students how to explore their personal reactions, to understand and appreciate both the things that make them different from their peers and the things that they have in common, and to effectively and respectfully voice their own opinions and viewpoints.

Definition of Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is the proposed, unofficial term for the current geologic period when human activity has been the dominant force on the planet. [The National Geographic Resource Library](#) has a succinct discussion of the origins of the term and its current status among geologists.

Affordances of *The Anthropocene Reviewed*

The short essay structure of *The Anthropocene Reviewed* affords instructors and students some options previous Common Reading Texts have not. Most of the essays are short enough to be read in the first ten-fifteen minutes of class. Each essay can stand independently from the others, so each can be treated as a primary text.

Class Discussion/Writing Prompts

1. John Green's *The Anthropocene Reviewed* is about reviewing what it means to be a human. Think about an experience you have had that has greatly impacted your life and review it in the same manner he does in his book.
2. "Bonneville Salt Flats" – This story is about a lake that transformed into salt flats. Think about all of the different iterations of yourself and the path that brought you to UM. Knowing everything you know now, what would you tell the younger version(s) of yourself?
3. "Scratch 'n' Sniff Stickers" – This story is about childhood longing. Think about the nostalgia of home. Is there something in your life that transports you back to a specific space and time? Reflect on these feelings in relation to your new home at UM.

4. “Lascaux Cave Paintings” – This story is about discovery and preservation of the past. You are not the first student to come to UM, and you will not be the last. Think about what kind of mark you want to leave while you are here for future students to behold.
5. “Halley’s Comet” – College is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, similar to experiencing Halley’s Comet. Think about the roadmap you would like to take as you navigate UM. Write about five things that are on your bucket list to complete while you are a student here.
6. “You’ll Never Walk Alone” – This story is about the crowd experience. While you are an individual at UM, you are sharing these four years with other groups such as other freshmen, others in your major or school, and/or others in your student groups. Write about a time at UM when you felt as though you were part of a larger collective and not walking alone.
7. “Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance” – This story is about the known and unknown. First, it’s about three farmers on their way to a dance, but they do not know they are on their way to war as well. You are also experiencing a transitional moment in your life. Think about a picture that was taken in the last year. What were your expectations and goals in relation to where you are now? (Bonus: Share the picture with the class.)
8. “Academic Decathlon” – This story is about rising to the occasion as part of a team, and it shows that all team members are important and contribute to the success of the collective. Write about an experience in which you exceeded your own expectations.
9. “The Hot Dogs of Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur” – This story is about an experience meeting (or exceeding) the expectations of that experience. Think about your journey at UM so far. How has the experience met the hype?
10. “Auld Lang Syne” - This story is about longing for something past. Think about something in your life that you would miss if it were not there. Write about the kind of longing that is related in this story with regard to that subject.

GROUP/INDIVIDUAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Research Project/Presentation:** Think about what it means to be a human. Express this in pictures taken from all different forms of media in a presentation to your peers.
2. **Talk Response:** *The Anthropocene Reviewed* is also a podcast that can be found on all major podcast platforms. Listen to the episode from September 19, 2019, “QWERTY and the Kaua‘i ‘ō‘ō.” The Kaua‘i ‘ō‘ō is an extinct bird. In this story, John Green recounts

playing the call of the last Kaua‘i ‘ō‘ō and having that same bird come back in response to its own call. Talk as a group about the effect of a human-centered planet on non-human entities. Think also about how we make change, good or bad, as a collective human society.

3. **Vignette Writing Assignment:** All of the stories in *The Anthropocene Reviewed* connect humans as a collective. Think about your life both before UM and now, during your first semester at UM. Connections to other humans are a backdrop to our everyday lives. Often, we are walking through it, but not connecting ourselves to that experience. How can you connect your life experiences to people around you? Write a vignette (experience) that you can intentionally connect to the people around you.

CLASS ACTIVITIES

1. **Welcome Week:** Pick a welcome week activity for your class to do together or in groups. Have the students write a reflection and rate the experience.
2. **Scavenger Hunt:** Have your class complete the scavenger hunt in groups while following the directions for that activity. After they have completed it, have them write a reflection about the experience and rate the experience.
3. **Walk in Bailey’s Woods:** Meet your class there and enjoy a meditative, silent walk through Bailey’s Woods. Have the students write a reflection and rate the experience.

Chapter 5: Integrating *The Anthropocene Reviewed* into WRIT 100/101

The first-semester, first-year writing courses—WRIT 100 and WRIT 101—use the Common Reading Text as the basis for a major writing project. This project emphasizes the critical reading, critical thinking, analysis, research, and synthesis skills that are vital to college writing. In this assignment, students are given a prompt pertaining to the Common Reading Text and asked to compose an essay that integrates the Common Reading Text with outside sources and/or the student’s own ideas. The prompts are intentionally complex to introduce students to the expectations of college thinking and writing. First-year writing courses use the Common Reading Text as a basis for student reading and writing rather than as a literary study.

Definition of Anthropocene

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Affordances of *The Anthropocene Reviewed*

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Discussion Starters

1. *The Anthropocene Reviewed* began as a podcast before Green turned it into a full-length book. Listen to one of the episodes, and then read the same section of the book. What are the differences? Why do you suppose some parts have been changed, even slightly? What are the complications in turning a podcast into a book?
2. In a [June 10, 2021 review of *The Anthropocene Reviewed* for *The Michigan Daily*](#), Meera S. Kumar claims that Green “writes with such unconditional love for the world.” What does she mean by this? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Point to an example of a review from the book to explore Kumar’s assessment.
3. In “The Notes” (279-93), Green shares his inspirations for the reviews and thanks the individuals who helped him, including a middle school teacher who complimented his writing

(281). Read over the notes. Which notes surprised you? Which did you find interesting? Where do writers get their ideas?

4. Near the end of “Viral Meningitis,” Green considers human beings’ ability to listen and empathize. He writes, “The challenge and responsibility of personhood, it seems to me, is to recognize personhood in others – to listen to others’ pain and take it seriously, even when you yourself cannot feel it” (203). Why do you think Green uses the words “challenge” and “responsibility” in this passage? How well do you think you listen to and empathize with others? How well do you think we empathize with others as a country? What are the benefits of listening and empathizing?

5. *The Anthropocene Reviewed* features 44 titled reviews as part of the regular text. The book also features three hidden reviews. Find and read the hidden reviews. Why do you think Green includes them? Is it for comedic effect or something more serious? What do the hidden reviews add or take away from the book as a whole? Why?

6. Reviewer [Samantha Penn](#) says *The Anthropocene Reviewed* is not a “pick up and read project” but rather a “bathroom reader or coffee table book” where a reader should “jump around . . . and pick a topic that sound[s] interesting.” How is reading a book of essays different from reading a full-length book, like a novel or a biography? How did you approach reading this book?

7. The subtitle of the book is “Essays on a Human-Centered Planet.” Would you describe our planet as “human-centered”? Why, or why not?

8. Despite beginning the review “Indianapolis” (159-63) sounding less than impressed with the city, even once playing with the motto “Indianapolis: You gotta live somewhere,” Green goes on to explain the benefits of living there. He ends the review by giving the city four out of five stars. How would you review your hometown? How many stars would you give it? Why? Do you feel like most others from the place would agree? Why?

Reflection Prompts

1. Green often uses pop culture as a jumping off point for his essays (“Diet Dr Pepper,” “Scratch ’n’ Sniff Stickers,” “You’ll Never Walk Alone”). What pop culture items might you choose to write about. Why? What’s the fascination for you?

2. In the essay “The Yips” (139-44), Green uses the stories of tennis player Ana Ivanovic and baseball player Rick Ankiel to examine the human capacity for change and accommodation. What tendencies or aspects of human nature intrigue you? What stories come to mind in relation to those tendencies?

3. Nostalgia and memory are components of many essays in the book (“Teddy Bears,” “The Hall of Presidents”). What childhood memories, items, or places stay with you? Why are they so powerful?

4. In “Bonneville Salt Flats” (185-90), Green writes about visiting a natural wonder for the first time. What are the natural wonders you would like to see but haven’t yet? Why do they interest you?

5. In “Canada Geese” (55-59), Green writes about geese as part nuisance/part wonder. What natural phenomena do you feel ambivalence toward? Why?

6. In the “Postscript” to *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, Green writes that for him “reading and rereading are an everlasting apprenticeship” (272). Reflect on your own reading habits. Have they changed in college? Why or why not? Is rereading important to you as a student? Why or why not? If you feel you are a good reader, what helps you? If not, what can you do to be a better reader? And why does being a good reader matter?

7. *The Anthropocene Reviewed* is a series of reviews based on the five-star scale. Practice writing your own review by reflecting on your time in college and your college-level writing so far. What have been the positive and negative experiences? How have you been challenged and evolved as a writer and learner? Why is growing as a writer important to you as you progress in college? Finish your reflection by assigning your experiences up until now a value on the five-star scale.

8. In “Academic Decathlon” (89-94), Green covers how he came to join his high school’s team and how that team, by rule, featured students with GPAs ranging from excellent to average. One of Green’s points, whether directly or indirectly, is that you don’t have to be an “A” student to be intelligent and to be an interested learner. During his time on the academic decathlon team, Green started to earn better grades through better study skills and by building confidence. Reflect on ways you can become a better student and gain from the experiences in your writing and other classes. How does writing help you become a better learner and student? How much do grades matter to you and why? Are grades always a reflection of how much you learn and grow from academic experiences? Why or why not? How might better study skills help you in ways beyond grades?

9. Green is a co-founder of the educational video YouTube channel *Crash Course*. Watch the following video about writing papers: <https://thecrashcourse.com/courses/papers-essays-crash-course-study-skills-9/>. Then, reflect on what you watched. Do you already use some of the approaches covered in the video? If so, what? How do the approaches work for you? If not, what did you learn that you might try on future papers? Why did certain ideas stand out to you from the video?

10. Green notes that the world is full of awe-inspiring beauty and wonder in “Our Capacity for Wonder” (29-33). He suggests, though, that “our attentiveness ... is in short supply, our ability and willingness to do the work that awe requires” (33). College is a time when there is so much competing for your attention; however, it should also be a time when your sense of wonder helps you grow as a learner, a student, and a person. It is a time when people become involved in classes, majors, organizations, and activities that help shape them. Reflect on how well you keep your sense of attention and wonder. What can you do to expand your sense of wonder? Why does a sense of wonder matter? How might a better sense of wonder help you as a student and in your life?

11. On page 11, Green includes a footnote explaining that he has been a fan of the Liverpool Football Club for years. Read the footnote, and think about your own preferences and beliefs. Where did they come from? Can you trace any of them to a specific childhood interaction like Green does?

12. Green has a curious mind, something that is of great benefit to college students. He makes a habit of noticing, questioning, and exploring the world around him. Those habits can be built and improved through practice. Start with these questions: What surprised you or aroused your curiosity today? What do you already know about that topic or idea? What more do you want to know? Where or how would you start learning more?

Spotlight Essay Prompt

Your Own *Anthropocene Reviewed* (created by Jenny Bucksbarg, DWR Lecturer)

Assignment:

In *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, John Green combines personal narrative and researched information. For this project, you will be doing something similar. We’ll be using *The Anthropocene Reviewed* as a model and inspiration to create a collection of three 1-2 page narratives. Please choose three (3) of the following prompts to guide your narratives:

- Using “Scratch ’n’ Sniff Stickers,” one of your narratives should explore how a specific smell is connected with an experience (positive, negative, or a complicated mixture of both) that has stuck with you and shaped you in some way. What do you want the reader to take away from reading about this experience?
- Using “Velociraptors,” one narrative should explore a memory of when you discovered something that you had thought was “real” or “true” that you learned from pop culture actually was not accurate according to science, history, or sociology, etc. What is significant about this discovery that you want to share with your reader?

- Using “The Internet” and/or “Googling Strangers,” one narrative should focus on sharing an experience of using the Internet, an app, or a different specific form of technology. What does this experience suggest about your relationship with technology? What could sharing this suggest about humans' relationship with technology?
- Using “Academic Decathlon,” one of your narratives should explore how your relationship with a specific person has helped shape your identity. How have they taught you something that has stayed with you? What message do you want your reader to understand about who you are?
- Using “Harvey” and/or “Auld Lang Syne,” one narrative should explore how a specific piece of pop culture helped you when you were in a negative or challenging place in your life. What was this movie, TV/streaming show, or song? How did it help you cope and make things seem more manageable?

Process and Requirements:

As a class we will read and discuss many of the essays from *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, but we won't have time for all of them--you may want to read more on your own to get a better understanding of Green's style and for more inspiration. At the end of each of your narratives, rate the experiences/topics of your narratives like Green does at the end of each of his essays.

Based on your message, or the significance of what you explore, the “why” of your rating should be clear to your reader.

Your narratives will need to be multimodal. This means that you will need to have at least one other mode of communication besides written text. For example, you may decide to include images or video/audio clips. But, you are also encouraged to challenge yourself and try out a format/style/software/platform that you haven't used before. However, each narrative should include 1-2 pages of written text.

You can also include researched information like Green does if you would like. If you decide to include outside sources, you'll want to add links in your narrative to your sources. We will discuss how to properly cite sources via hyperlinks in class.

You will peer review each of the narratives; however, feel free to schedule a session with the Writing Center and/or conference with me for extra support.

Essay Prompts

1. Practice critical reading, mentor text analysis, synthesis, argument, integrating sources, and reflection.

Studying techniques used by other writers is a great way to improve your own writing. Choose one of Green’s reviews you found particularly effective. Examine the review closely by responding to the following questions (adapted from the [Iowa Reading Research Center](#)):

- In five sentences or less, describe the main point and content of the review.
- From what point of view was this review written? How would the text change if written from a different point of view?
- What do you notice about the review’s structure or organization? Can you be specific about what text structure was used (e.g., description, cause and effect, comparison/contrast, order/sequence, problem-solution)? What was Green trying to accomplish overall with the review, and how did his text structure choices help with that?
- What do you notice about the word choice in the review? Identify a word or phrase Green uses effectively. Why did he use that word or phrase? What was he trying to accomplish?
- Identify another technique Green uses in the review. What did you like about this technique? How might this technique influence the reader?
- Describe the technique or approach Green uses for the first paragraph of the review. Why did he choose that technique or approach?
- Describe the technique or approach Green uses for ending the review. Why did he choose that technique or approach?

Following your analysis of Green’s choices, prepare to write your own review, using Green’s review as a mentor text. You might choose the same subject or an entirely new one. As you work on your review, consult your analysis of Green’s review. Which of Green’s strategies or techniques might help you? In writing the review, also keep in mind the core elements of Green’s reviews (definition of subject, basic research, personal connections, rating). For more information on those core elements, see [Lincolnwood Library’s Fandom Kit](#).

2. Practice critical reading, audience analysis, text analysis, argument, integrating sources, comparison/contrast, and reflection.

Reading an essay collection is an interesting experience. Some of the essays really resonate with a specific reader. Others, not so much. Delve into this experience for yourself. Choose two reviews from the book, one you liked a lot and one you didn’t care for. Analyze the essays in terms of your reading experience. What did you respond to in the one you liked? What was unfavorable about the one that fell flat? What did John Green do (or not do) in each review that prompted your reaction? Then, analyze yourself as a reader. Which of your personal characteristics might have affected your response? Which of your life experiences might have

influenced your reaction? Finally, think about the context in which the book was written and in which you are reading it. What forces outside of Green’s efforts and your personal characteristics might have had an impact on your response to each text? Finally, write a thesis-driven essay in which you analyze your reading experience of *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, focusing specifically on your two chosen essays and considering Green’s strategies, your reading identity, and the context in which the book was written and read. Be sure to cite from the text.

3. *Practice critical reading, synthesis, analysis, argument, integrating sources, reflection, and comparison/contrast.*

Green quotes poets, authors, and others regularly throughout *The Anthropocene Reviewed*. For example, the book is barely a page old when Green quotes author Allegra Goodman about writing her life story. In the “Postscript,” Green even writes that the book is “maybe overfilled with [quotes]” (272). Why does Green bring in so many other voices to his reviews of the Anthropocene? What do we as readers gain or lose from the exposure to so many voices? Compose a thesis-driven essay in which you select one review where Green includes at least two quotations, and analyze how the quoted material adds to or detracts from the reading experience. Do the quoted parts relate directly to the rating? Do they help you think about the issue more clearly, or do they complicate your understanding? Is one quote more effective than the other(s)? Why or why not? Make an argument about how the material impacts the reading experience, and be sure to cite the text.

4. *Practice critical reading, synthesis, analysis, argument, integrating sources, reflection, and comparison/contrast.*

The Anthropocene Reviewed covers some upsetting material such as disease, climate change, depression, and death. However, many of the reviews feature hope as a theme, for both Green and the human race. Compose a thesis-driven essay in which you select two reviews that you find as hopeful, and analyze how Green uses hope to inspire readers. Why does Green want readers to be optimistic or hopeful, even when the subject matter might not be positive? What does Green write to inspire hope? What emotions might readers feel when reading the reviews you selected? How are the reviews you selected similar and/or different, and why does that matter in thinking about inspiring hope? Can reading influence changes in people’s behaviors and/or attitudes? Make an argument about how Green tries to encourage hope in his readers and how successful he is, and be sure to cite the text.

5. *Practice critical reading, analysis, argument, integrating sources, and exploration.*

Reviews, by nature, are subjective. People have different reactions to movies, books, albums, restaurants, etc. However, these things are all traditional subjects for reviews. In *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, Green covers subjects such as geese, grass, whispering, sunsets, etc. Pick one or two chapters with a focus not typically a subject(s) for review, and compose a

thesis-driven essay in which you analyze what Green is saying about modern society by reviewing it or them. What is the bigger picture commentary Green is making about people in the current age? Why is a one- to five-star scale an appropriate or inappropriate way to examine your chosen area(s) of focus? Why are we as a society so interested in rating our experiences? How does Green work to provide a rating for subjects not typically reviewed? Explore both Green’s writing and the nature of reviews, and be sure to cite the text.

6. *Practice critical reading, analysis, argument, integrating sources, and exploration.*

In a [May 17, 2021 review](#) of *The Anthropocene Reviewed* for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Elizabeth Greenwood writes that the book is a great read “whenever you need a reminder of what it is to feel small and human, in the best possible way.” What does Greenwood mean when she says the book makes readers “feel small and human”? Select two of the reviews from the book, and compose a thesis-driven essay in which you examine how the sections might make readers “feel small and human.” Why is this a positive experience, as Greenwood says it is? What might readers gain by thinking about the topics in the sections you have chosen? Do the title or the format of the book contribute to readers’ feelings? Is feeling “small and human” empowering or humbling, or both, and why does this matter? Explore Greenwood’s assessment of the reading experience, and be sure to cite the text.

7. *Practice critical reading, analysis, argument, integrating sources, and research.*

In the “Introduction” to *The Anthropocene Reviewed* and in an [interview with Elisabeth Egan of The New York Times \(June 10, 2021\)](#), Green says that he doesn’t “want to write in code anymore” (2). He goes on in the *NYT* interview to say about writing this book that he “wanted to try to write as myself because I’ve never done that in any formal way. I wanted to try to think about how I was looking at the world.” One can assume that he is referring to the differences between writing fiction and non-fiction. Consider the differences between fiction and non-fiction. What are the benefits and drawbacks of each form? Then, do some research on Green. Why do you think he felt that this book was the right time to make this switch? Compose a thesis-driven essay in which you identify one review from the book that you think especially captures Green’s desire not to write in code, and make an argument why this is. You should bring in information from your research on Green, and be sure to cite from *The Anthropocene Reviewed*.

8. *Practice critical reading, analysis, argument, integrating sources, and research.*

What makes someone a good writer? Listed below are eight habits of mind, or intellectual characteristics, that the National Council of Teachers of English identify as essential to success in college and professional writing. Green is a successful writer. Which of these habits of mind are exemplified in *The Anthropocene Reviewed*? How do these essays reveal these characteristics? Are any of these habits of mind absent? Write an essay analyzing how the

reviews in *The Anthropocene Reviewed* demonstrate (or fail to demonstrate) three or four of these habits of mind. Give specific examples from the text to support your analysis.

- Curiosity – the desire to know more about the world
- Openness – the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world
- Engagement – a sense of investment and involvement in learning
- Creativity – the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas
- Persistence – the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects
- Responsibility – the ability to take ownership of one’s actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others
- Flexibility – the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands
- Metacognition – the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge

Appendix

Sample Rubrics

Sample Group Presentation Rubric

1. Was the content of the presentation well organized and presented with compelling evidence?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

2. Did the visual component enhance the presentation?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

3. Was the verbal presentation clear and engaging?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

4. Did the group engage the class in a discussion?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

5. Did the group follow the time limits?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

Sample Group Presentation Peer Evaluation

Your name: _____

1) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

2) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

3) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

4) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

Other comments or concerns about your group and how you worked together? (use back)

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR RESPONSE PAPERS

STUDENT'S NAME: _____

ASSIGNMENT TITLE: _____

SCORE:

CONVENTIONS/MECHANICS		
Ineffective	Partially-effective	Effective
Multiple errors in writing hamper communication, and text does not demonstrate standard English grammar, punctuation, and/or usage, and/or does not meet the requirements for length and format.	Minimal errors in standard English, grammar, punctuation, and/or usage are present in some of the writing, and/or the text does not meet requirements for assignment length and/or format.	The writing meets guidelines for standard English grammar, punctuation, and usage, with very few minor errors present. Meets requirements for assignment length and format.
D / F	C	B

INFORMATION PRESENTED			
Ineffective	Partially-effective	Effective	Exceptional
Does not introduce or integrate information relevant to the topic/event, or includes inappropriate use of sources. In the case of an event paper, it is unclear that the event was attended.	Demonstrates only minimal or ineffective use of integrating information relevant to the topic/event. Writing only barely addresses details of event or class materials.	Introduces and integrates information relevant to the topic/event. Writing addresses details of event or class materials and places information within a larger context.	Demonstrates exceptionally strong, integrated information that enhances credibility of writing. Writing includes skillfully represented details about event or class materials.
D / F	C	B	A

REFLECTION/RESPONSE			
Ineffective	Partially-effective	Effective	Exceptional
Fails to explore new ideas and/or works without making any connection between event or class materials and a personal context.	Begins exploration of new ideas but could push further. Experience of event or class materials is put in a personal context but lacks development of ideas.	Explores ideas unfamiliar to the reader, and questions different thinking. Puts experience of event or class materials in a personal context, is well-developed, and includes self-evaluation.	Exhibits a significant investigation of new ideas by way of exploring an event or class materials. Shows signs of personal growth and/or considerable self-evaluation.
D / F	C	B	A

Write additional comments on the back of the rubric.