



# YELLOWSTONE FOREVER

## GOOD ANCESTORS: A WRITING WORKSHOP

### Itinerary & Details

FIELD SEMINAR – WINTER 2023/24

**INSTRUCTOR:** Chris La Tray

**INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY:** Chris La Tray is a Métis writer and storyteller, a walker, observer, poet, teacher, and pillar of the Montana literary community. His first book, *One-Sentence Journal: Short Poems and Essays from the World At Large* (2018, Riverfeet Press) won the 2018 Montana Book Award and a 2019 High Plains Book Award. A second book, *Descended from a Travel-worn Satchel*, was released by FootHills Publishing on September 21st, 2021. His next book, *Becoming Little Shell*, will be published by Milkweed Editions in Summer, 2024. Chris is an enrolled member of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians.

**ACTIVITY LEVEL:** This course is activity level 1 and students enrolled in this course are expected to be active participants. Be prepared for leisurely hikes up to 1 mile per day through relatively flat terrain on maintained or snow-packed trails.

*\*All field activities will be conducted as a group. If participants cannot meet the activity level expectations during the program, they may be restricted from participation in daily outings. Program itineraries or activities will not be altered to accommodate participants who cannot meet the expectations of the stated activity level.*

**LOCATION:** Lamar Buffalo Ranch – Yellowstone National Park, WY

**PROGRAM DATES & TIMES:** The program begins at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 17, 2023, and goes through Thursday, December 21, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.

**LODGING CHECK-IN & CHECK-OUT:** Lodging check-in begins at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 17, 2023 and lodging check-out is at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, December 22, 2023.

**MEALS:** This course is not catered. Participants will need to bring their own food; lunch should be able to travel in the field.

For general information about the facilities, preparing for classes, what to expect, cancellation policies, and more, please see the [Lamar Buffalo Ranch - Winter General Information](#) document.

## PROGRAM ITINERARY

We are all ancestors. We are ancestors as beings made of spirit before our births and again after we live our lives and return to the spirit world. We are ancestors as physical beings inhabiting a lifetime. The actions of each influence how we exist in the other.

"In every moment, whether we like it or not and whether we know it or not, we are advancing values and influencing systems that will continue long past our lifetimes," write the editors in the introduction to *What Kind of Ancestor Do You Want to Be?* (2021, University of Chicago Press). "These values and systems shape communities and lives that we will never see. The ways we live create and reinforce the foundation of life for future generations. We are responsible for how we write our values, what storylines we further and set forth—the world we choose to cultivate for the lives that follow ours. So how are we to live?"

So unfolds a simple question: what does it mean to be a "good" ancestor? What are the values we will choose to write? How do we honor those who came before, and those to follow? Should we even care? Do we? These questions and others will form the basis for the winter Yellowstone Forever workshop at Lamar Buffalo Ranch: *Good Ancestors*. What is the future you are co-creating through your actions? What is the past you have responsibility to uphold, or to reconcile?

Participants will turn their elemental attention to the mighty Yellowstone National Park. Monumental history has been written in this massive ecosystem for thousands of years. What are the stories told through the historical basis of all our ecosystems, even if we've never experienced this one personally? How do we tap into that? How does reflecting on these places, connecting to them and the uncountable lives they provided for, influence our work today? Does it anyway, even if we aren't aware? As the great Katherine May (author of *Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times* and most recently *Enchantment: Awakening Wonder in an Anxious Age*) has said (quoted loosely here): "There are many wonderful workshops out there to make you a better writer. This isn't one of them." This is a perfect example of how Chris views his workshops. Participants aren't going to "workshop" pieces to make them better. Chris's contention is that at the point of the process we are talking about with this kind of work – in a truly wild place, discussing, considering, making notes – is that what ends up on the page is the least important. The real thing is happening in your head, in your heart, and in your gut. The nuts-and-bolts stuff comes later. There will be opportunities to write and discuss and share, if you want, but it isn't a requirement. Although it will be encouraged!

The itinerary is designed to take advantage of the best opportunities in the park, but may be adjusted to adapt to weather conditions, wildlife activity, holidays, and road construction. *The details and timing of the agenda are subject to change.*

### **Day 1**      **Welcome**

The program starts with an evening orientation. Participants will get to know one another and be introduced to life at the Lamar Buffalo Ranch. Throughout orientation, the seminar itinerary, key discussion concepts and what to expect for the field each day will be addressed.

### **Days 2 - 5**      **Field Days**

Most mornings will likely begin with a field outing by bus. After arriving back at the ranch (after more coffee and breakfast) the group will begin with a discussion and most likely a timed writing to a prompt, after which there will be a share-out and discussion.

Midday activity will be more ad hoc based on where the class ends up after the morning session. A period of rest and reflection is essential to allow for meaningful discussion and contributions, so during the middle of the day the class will be spontaneous. Evenings will be more like the morning: discussion, prompt, write. Sometimes there will even be a second outing by bus.

### **Day 6**      **Check-Out**

Breakfast and check out of cabins by 9:00 a.m.

## PROGRAM EQUIPMENT

For a full list of recommended equipment for all courses see the [Lamar Buffalo Ranch - Winter General Information](#) document.

### REQUIRED:

- **Notebook** (or two), something to write with (perhaps several somethings) and, critically, curiosity and kindness.

## RECOMMENDED READING

There are books and reference materials at the ranch for the class to enjoy during the stay. In addition to those materials, the following recommended and required readings are listed to enhance the Field Seminar.

### REQUIRED READING

- Hausdoerffer, John. *What Kind of Ancestor Do You Want to Be?* University of Chicago Press. 2021.

### RECOMMENDED READING

- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions. 2015.
- Yunkaporta, Tyson. *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*. HarperOne. 2021.
- Jamail, Dahr and Rushworth, Stan. *We Are the Middle of Forever: Indigenous Voices from Turtle Island on the Changing Earth*. The New Press. 2022.
- Krawec, Patty. *Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past and Reimagining Our Future*. Broadleaf Books. 2022.
- Wagamese, Richard. *One Drum: Stories and Ceremonies for a Planet*. Douglas & McIntyre. 2020.
- Smith, Cynthia L. *Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids*. Heartdrum. 2022.
- Krznaric, Roman. *The Good Ancestor: A Radical Prescription for Long-Term Thinking*. The Experiment. 2020.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*. Belknap Press. 2022.

## WHOM TO CONTACT

**For any questions, concerns, or additional information please contact the following:**

- Program itinerary, health forms, payment, and activity questions please contact Yellowstone Forever at [institute@yellowstone.org](mailto:institute@yellowstone.org) or 406-848-2400
- Road updates, park conditions, and general park information please contact Yellowstone National Park Service at <https://www.nps.gov/yell/contacts.htm>
- If running late for a program, please contact 406-848-2400