

Second Annual La Grande Lit Week

Free Literary Readings and Conversations

Eastern Oregon University's low-residency MFA Program in Creative Writing will put on its second annual La Grande Lit Week from July 17 to 22, offering free literary readings and conversations once more in downtown La Grande by award-winning writers from around the Northwest. One-hour writing classes with these authors in EOU's Badgley Hall will also be offered for a registration fee of \$20. The La Grande Lit Week coincides with the MFA program's annual summer residency.

In its second year, the format of Lit Week will have more events on Friday and Saturday to give those days a festival atmosphere and encourage literature fans to descend on La Grande. Friday and Saturday will feature five different winners of the Oregon Book Awards. The week also will showcase many books related to the programs special Landscape, Ecology, and Community concentration. A number of the featured authors will be in conversation with EOU MFA faculty after short readings.



Photo courtesy of Eastern Oregon University

Lit Week begins Monday, July 17, with a 6:30 pm event at Cook Memorial Library featuring literary journalist Michelle Nijhuis and her recent book *Beloved Beasts: Fighting for Life in the Age of Extinction*, which "traces the history of the movement to protect and conserve other forms of life" and won the Sierra Club's 2021 Rachel Carson Award. On Wednesday, July 19, Eileen Garvin will read from her best-selling novel *The Music of Bees*.

EOU MFA faculty members Megan Kruse, Melissa Matthewson, and Joe Wilkins will read before Garvin's event.

Both Nijhuis and Garvin will offer one-hour community classes before their events, but the rest of the week's community classes will occur on Friday between 12:45 to 3:45 pm, and Saturday morning from 9 am to 12 pm, in total fourteen classes. Half the seats in each community class are reserved for MFA students,

the other half for the public by registration.. "Whether you're looking for a burst of inspiration or a dose of continuing education in creative writing, the community classes are a great opportunity to study with some of the most prominent writers in the region," said EOU MFA director and Assistant Professor of English/Writing Nick Neely.

Friday evening, Sindya Bhanoo, the 2023 Oregon Book Award winner in fiction, will

present *Seeking Fortune Elsewhere*, a collection of short stories about South Indian immigrants, and in particular women, navigating "dislocation and dissonance" in new environments including Eastern Washington. On Saturday, six poets will read their contributions to *Cascadia Field Guide: Art, Ecology, and Poetry* to celebrate this landmark regional anthology. The book has spent 16 straight weeks on the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association best-sellers list.

Poet Garrett Hongo, a former Pulitzer Prize finalist in poetry, will then present his recent memoir *The Perfect Sound*, which, as the poet Yunte Huang describes, "ingeniously mixes personal memoir with cultural history and offers us an indispensable guide for the search of acoustic truth." Hongo recounts the obsession with music and stereo that has been pivotal to the formation of his identity.

Lit Week will finish on Saturday evening at 7 pm session featuring Emme Lund and her debut novel *The Boy with a Bird in His Chest*, a work of magical realism that explores queerness, and at 8:15 pm, a hybrid visual-musical-poetry finale performance by Dao Strong, winner of the 2022 Oregon Book Award in Poetry.

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