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## Overview of FARM: A Multimodal Reader

This book focuses on the culture of agriculture. By *culture*, we mean the knowledge, beliefs, laws, customs, ethics, and art of a society. Culture is a complex concept. It is universal but is also particular to groups. Culture is especially appropriate when focusing on farming. Consider that *cultivation*, a form of culture, can refer to agricultural improvement. Cicero, one of the foremost rhetoricians of Ancient times, writes of cultivation of the soul, comparing spiritual development to agriculture. Throughout this book, you will look at a variety of texts as lenses with which to view the topic of farming. These texts take multiple forms: literary works, essays, recipes, menus. The interdisciplinary nature of the selections allows readers to consider what farms, farming, and farmers means to us as a culture. The texts include examples from all states in the continental United States. We also look at the art of farming: fine art, film, and photography. Take, for instance, the cover of this book—a painting by Jon Anderson of a mountain valley in spring with a barn inscribed with an ad for Woman’s Tonic. This romanticized vision of farming is but one theme to be explored in the pages that follow.

While early chapters include ancient and European texts (medieval through Renaissance), the book focuses mostly on the American farm. Readers move through the Jeffersonian idealism of the yeoman farmer (“Cultivators of the earth are the chosen people of God”) to literature of the 19th and 20th centuries (Thoreau’s bean field, Cather’s prairie novel, Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, as well as very contemporary memoirs like *Farm City*). A considerable amount of history contextualizes the literary texts, such as discussion of sharecropping vs. plantation systems, the rise of agribusiness and chemical farming, and Teddy Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission. Written, visual, and oral texts ask readers to consider the farm in music (Woody Guthrie), art (Grant Wood), ecology (Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*), children’s and young adult literature, advertising (from early boosterism to Chipotle videos), print culture (farmers’ market and victory garden posters from both world wars), folklore (food culture, vintners, and veterinarian practices, for instance), popular culture (Farm Aid concerts), and much more.

Michael Pollan, author of food-themed books such as *Cooked*, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, and *The Botany of Desire*, says this:

When I began writing about agriculture in the late ’80s and ’90s, I quickly figured out that no editor in Manhattan thought the subject timely or worthy of his or her attention, and that I would be better off avoiding the word entirely and talking about food, something people then still had some use for and cared about, yet oddly never thought to connect to the soil or the work of farmers.

*FARM: A Multi-Modal Reader* connects readers back to the soil and the work of farmers and explores how agriculture is essential to everyone—even if a person has never planted a seed, hoed a row, or pulled a carrot from the earth.

*A note on texts: original style conventions have been retained in texts that were written or translated in British English.*

## Activities and Icons Key

Each chapter includes activities that students may undertake. Icons represent these activities—images that come from the farm.



*Explore Activities* are noted by a shovel and pitchfork as you'll be digging for answers.



*Writing Assignments*—opportunities to compose—are noted by a hand sowing seeds as writing often plants seeds of thought to be harvested.



*Collaboration Activities* are designated by two farmers.



*Research*: Do you ever feel like you are looking for a needle in a haystack when undertaking a research project? The barn brings together all of the skills needed to undertake research.



*Field Trips*—what could be more appropriate for a class that explores farm literature and essays than taking a field trip? The tractor icon designates possible outings to enrich understanding of both farms and texts. Some field trips may be *virtual* as the Internet offers wonderful resources to explore.



*Viewing* offers suggestions for films and works of art, and is noted by the picture of the sun rising over a field.



*For Further Reading* offers suggestions for novels, stories, poetry, nonfiction that enrich the chapter. A sheaf of wheat represents these titles.

## References

Pollan, Michael. 2009. "Introduction." In *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food* by Wendell Berry, p xii. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.