WASTELANDS
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The impenetrable wilderness of *The Revenant*, the diseased streets of *Children of Men*, the trash heap cities of *Wall-E*—these are the wastelands that fascinate our pop culture. On the screen, they come to life as horrifying alternate universes and dead civilizations—the very fates we must avoid at all costs. And yet wastelands are not exclusively the stuff of science fiction. In this course, we will grapple with both imaginary and actual wastelands. We will begin with short stories by Jack London, Thomas King, and Octavia Butler. From the icy wilds of the Yukon to the borderlands of Native American exile, these writers question the way wastelands have been imagined, especially in North America, over the past century. Next, we will turn to real wastelands—to the garbage dumps and arid landscapes where nothing grows. We will ask what these places reveal about their inhabitants, their struggles, and their achievements. Finally, students will research a wasteland of their own choosing—anything from the mega slums of Mumbai to the sprawl of Boston's unused rooftops. Along the way, we will investigate how wastelands form and evolve, and how people adapt to them. Are wastelands actually the places we should avoid at all costs, or are they the places we can no longer afford to ignore?