Name: Alyssa Gagne
Title/Topic of Unit: Lake Champlain: Observing the Seen and Unseen
School/Location: Vermont Adult Learning/29 Church Street, Burlington, VT
Grade Levels: Grades 9-12
Subjects: English/Language Arts
Date Submitted: August 5, 2016

“A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.”-Henry David Thoreau

Overview:
Throughout this unit, students will read excerpts of Chapter IX: Ponds from Walden written by Henry David Thoreau. They will pay close attention to Thoreau’s clear description of the pond’s appearance and persona. My students live very close to Lake Champlain, the biggest body of water in Vermont. We will discuss our experiences with the lake to build an understanding of our connection to the water. As a class, we will take a series of walking field trips to Lake Champlain to participate in a nature journaling activity. Once back in the classroom, the students will turn their field notes into well-crafted descriptions of their observations. They will use Thoreau’s writings as an inspiration for capturing both the physical and emotional aspects of Lake Champlain for their written pieces. This unit will be carried out in the fall of 2016 as part of a larger course. The course is based on the Approaching Walden summer teacher development course. It will include the reading of parts of Walden, journal assignments, and field study opportunities within our community.

Description of School and Student Population:
Vermont Adult Learning is an educational center where students are able to earn a high school diploma through attending classes and completing their town’s high school requirements. I teach the reading and writing courses. In addition to focusing on reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing skills, I integrate science and social studies topics into my courses. Being able to combine Henry David Thoreau’s works and environmental awareness would greatly enrich the quality of my course offerings.

College and Career Readiness Standards Addressed:

Writing: CCR Anchor 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

➔ Apply Reading standards from this level to literature (e.g., “Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone”).

Reading: CCR Anchor 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
→ Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. (RI/RL.9-10.2)

Unit Objectives:
This unit of study will require students to slow down and analyze their surroundings, build an appreciation for the connection between Walden Pond and Lake Champlain, and improve their writing skills through peer feedback and revision.

Materials:
- “Ponds” from Walden by Henry David Thoreau (The Portable Thoreau, edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer)
- Nature journals
- Pens/pencils/colored pencils for journaling field trip and classroom observation
- Large Zip-Loc bags for collecting lake water
- Clear plastic bins for water analysis

Lesson #1: Reading (2 days, 1 hour class periods)

Objectives:
Students will read excerpts of Chapter IX: Ponds from Walden written by Henry David Thoreau. This text will be used as a foundational piece to begin our unit using observation as a tool for exploring the lake.

Procedure:
**Day 1:**
1. As with any local study, it is important to determine what students know about the lake and how they connect with the lake. Each student will be given a field notebook to record their notes throughout the unit. Students will free-write for 5 minutes to gather thoughts about their experience with the lake in their personal lives. What purpose does the lake serve in their lives, if any? They will take turns sharing their thoughts and memories with their classmates when the five minute timecap has come to an end. (15 minutes)
2. Using The Portable Thoreau: Walden, students will read pages 348-354 of the Ponds chapter. Students will read the excerpt in small groups as a first read and choose three lines/paragraphs that they feel evoke a strong emotion or vivid description. They may see a connection between Thoreau’s experience at the pond and their own experience with the lake. (45 minutes)

**Day 2:**
1. The class will reread pages 348-354 from Walden for a more thorough read as a whole group. We will take turns reading sections and pausing to discuss
vocabulary. We will pay special attention to the parts that students identified as meaningful during their first read-through. (45 minutes)

2. We will revisit the students’ field notebooks to make connections between our own experiences and Thoreau’s experiences. Are their similarities, or do our views and experiences of Lake Champlain hold a different place in our lives today? Do we often have the opportunity to just observe the lake and its surroundings? (15 minutes)

Lesson #2: Observing (4 days, 1 hour class periods)

Objective: Students will build an appreciation for details in their own community. Lake Champlain is within walking distance to our school, but we have never utilized the surroundings for a unit before. The students will focus on taking notes about what they see, feel, hear, and touch during their observation time.

Procedure:

Days 1-3:

1. Prior to leaving the classroom, students will review their selected passages from Walden: Ponds to focus their intentions for the day. We will practice sensory awareness by tuning into our senses and allowing the experience to guide their note-taking. They will gather their field notebooks, pencils, colored pencils, and an optional camera/phone camera in preparation for observation. Each entry will need a heading of the date, time, and location. (10 minutes)

2. The class will walk the 0.5 miles (15 minutes) to the shoreline of Lake Champlain. Once at the shoreline, each student will find a personal observation spot away from his or her friends. The expectation will be that students spend 20 minutes in silence, observing the lake and its surroundings. Each student should make a note of their exact spot because they will need to return to that spot three more times throughout the unit. Students will use the following prompts as a guide for their observation. (35 minutes)
   a. You can improve your ability to be aware of nature in a sensory way by focusing intentionally on each of your senses in turn. Start by closing your eyes and tune into your ears.
   b. Imagine what it would be like to be a bat with their massive ultrasonic ears. How many different sounds can you identify around you? What’s the quietest sound you can hear? What birds are calling in the distance?
   c. Then spend a couple minutes tuning into your nose. Sniff the air and everything around you. See how many scents you can identify in 5 minutes. What can you detect in the temperature and moisture content of the air?
   d. Then sit very still & tune into your body. Feel which direction the wind is blowing against your face. Feel the earth beneath your seat. Pick things up with your hands & test different substrates with your fingers.
e. Finally open your eyes & tune into your sense of sight. Notice all the different colors & shades of green. Use your peripheral vision and tune into broad patterns with your eyes.

3. Students will be given a 2 minute warning before we leave the shoreline. The class will walk back to the classroom as a group. (10 minutes) (Repeat for Days 2-3)

Day 4:
1. Students will repeat the cycle of observation at Lake Champlain. However, students will be given a gallon Zip-Loc bag to collect some lake water to use in the classroom as an additional observation time back in the classroom. The water will be consolidated into large plastic bins for Day 5’s class. (20 minutes of travel, 35 minutes of observation)

Day 5:
1. Students will conclude their observation routine with an in-class observation of the lake water. A plastic bin will be placed on each table of four students. The students will use their senses again to take notes on the contents of the water. They will be asked to pay special attention to any creatures or plant life in the water sample. Students can use their colored pencils to sketch in their field notebooks as well.
   a. Silent observation (15 minutes)
   b. Group observation and conversation (10 minutes)
2. Students will have the opportunity to share their findings from both the waterfront and the in-class observations with the entire class. (35 minutes)

Lesson #3: Writing (2 days, 1 hour class periods)

Objective: Students will compile their field notes into complete sentences and create a description of Lake Champlain. They will use their observations from the past five classes to depict the lake in regards to its appearance. The students will use their five senses to create a well-rounded description of the lake, inspired by Thoreau’s description of Walden Pond.

Procedure:
Day 1:
1. Students will review their chosen excerpts from Ponds from Walden. Students will use their favorite parts to assist in writing their own descriptions. Students can use Thoreau’s writings to mirror their observations if there are similarities. For instance, Thoreau gives descriptions of the color of the pond water. Students can use the format to describe the color of the lake water. During this class
period, students will have the opportunity to conference with the teacher for direction and initial feedback. (1 hour)

Day 2:
1. Students will continue to work on their final written pieces. The teacher will be on-call for feedback and support; however, students are encouraged to partner up with their peers for additional feedback. (1 hour)

Day 3:
1. As a closing activity, we will walk to the waterfront of Lake Champlain to read the final written products. Students will be encouraged to share their work with their classmates. If time permits, students may also share their favorite Thoreau passages that they picked out at the beginning of our lesson unit. (1 hour)

Rubric:

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<th>Possible Points</th>
<th>For Full Credit</th>
<th>Earned Points and Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Students will attend all classes and off-site observations. If a student needs to miss a class, arrangements need to be made with the teacher to make up missed work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Students will contribute to class discussions and cooperate with classmates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field Journal</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Each journal entry contains a date, time, and thorough description of each day of observation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written Description</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>The finished product includes evidence of</td>
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revision. Students will hand in a final draft in addition to the first draft and peer comments. Thoreau’s writings regarding Walden Pond are referenced in written piece.

| Total | 100 |

Bibliography: