

Tim O'Brien and Thoreau: Identity Formation through a Sense of Place

English grade 12, College Prep

The overarching theme of my Senior year English class is “The Search for Identity.” At this stage in their high school careers, students are at the advent of a new beginning, whether they are college bound or joining the workforce. Students in this grade benefit developmentally from considering the following essential question for the course:

- How is identity shaped by the environment, community, experiences, and choices of an individual?
- Is identity primarily defined by how we view ourselves, or how we are viewed by others?

For the first unit of this course, we will examine selected stories from Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* in conjunction with the theme of identity formation. The protagonist of these short stories, Tim, is similar to my students because he is faced with a difficult decision at the outset of his adult life: the choice between fighting a war he does not support or defecting to Canada when he receives his draft notice. As he writes about his moral dilemma and the setting of the Vietnam war itself, O'Brien reveals that our ‘sense of place’ impacts how we perceive ourselves and our actions in relation to the world around us.

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Duration:

The unit will take place at the beginning of the school year (starting the second week in September) and last approximately one week. *The Things They Carried* is the first book Seniors will read for 12th grade English. We will use the style and landscape of Tim O'Brien's Vietnam memoir to examine how place impacts a person, and how our choices affect who we become as individuals. The unit will begin and end with a journaling activity designed to help students reflect on the role of place in their personal development and how their own choices have impacted the course of their lives. These journals may become the foundation for later drafts of the college application essay, which students will write towards the end of September.

Unit Overview:

The first lesson of this unit will present students with a journaling activity designed to tap into the individual's relationship with nature. Students will consider a quotation by Henry David Thoreau, then reflect on the role of nature or their environment in their daily lives by composing a mindful journal entry outside. I feel that it is important for this first journaling activity to take place both during class time and in an outdoor setting, as it demonstrates to students that reflective writing is a valuable experience for not only academic benefits, but also personal growth. Later this week, when students will compose another journal entry for homework, they will think back to the time they spent outside in class, remembering to be mindful of the present moment and allow the descriptive writing process to help them reflect on larger themes or ideas in their personal lives.

On the second day of the lesson, I will introduce a short story from Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* and connect it to our discussion of place. The Thoreauvian idea of 'sense of place' helps us become aware of how our physical and emotional surroundings impact our thoughts and actions as individuals. Students will read and analyze the setting of the short story "Night Life" to examine the impact of the Vietnam war on Rat Kiley's character. They will also practice their annotation and close reading skills by evaluating O'Brien's authorial

craft in writing the story. They will apply these same annotation and interpretation skills when they read the next assigned short story, “The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong,” for homework that night.

The next day’s lesson will begin with a student-driven class discussion about the reading, which features a young girl who changes drastically after coming to the wild and alluring landscape of Vietnam. Students will debate with their peers why they think this character has changed, and whether her change is for the better or worse. The course of this discussion will require students to refer to textual evidence for support of their claims. Students will then develop their arguments more formally by analyzing a key passage from the text and drafting an analytical paragraph outline defending their claim about the story’s overall message. This paragraph checkpoint may serve as a formative assessment of students’ writing abilities or be revised into a larger summative assignment, depending on the student and teacher needs.

Students will read and annotate the next short story, “On the Rainy River,” for homework and respond to reading questions in preparation for the following day’s lesson. In the story, the protagonist must make a pivotal choice between going to war or staying true to his political and moral beliefs. We will use this short story on the fourth day to discuss the implications of civil disobedience, making further connections to Henry David Thoreau’s ideology. Students will reread key passages from Thoreau’s essay “Civil Disobedience” and examine them in connection to the protests of the Vietnam War and O’Brien’s protagonist. At the culmination of this discussion, the entire class will contribute to a definition of civil disobedience by referring to modern and hypothetical examples of justified law breaking.

The final lesson for this unit will combine both the skills and essential concepts students have tackled so far. Students will reflect on the journal-writing process and share their journals or experiences with peers, discussing how to effectively recreate a moment or experience with reflective meaning. These skills, both examined in Tim O’Brien’s stories and practiced in their own journaling activities, will help my students craft a final personal narrative that will lay the foundation of a future college essay assignment. My hope is that by the end of this unit, students will have not only learned analytical writing skills, but also considered their own lives and experiences more deeply through setting-based mindful reflection.

Unit Objectives*:

Students will be able to...

- analyze the impact of the author's choices, such as setting, plot, and character development, regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story.
- examine the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, especially with language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
- cite strong textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- integrate, evaluate, and synthesize multiple sources in order to address a central question.
- write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and plot, to develop their experiences and events.
- use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the setting, events, and their experiences.

*Aligned with Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, Grades 11-12

Unit Outline:

- I. Lesson One: A Natural Education
 - A. Activator (Thoreau quote, respond in journal, turn and talk)
 - B. Class discussion revolving around quote
 - C. Journaling activity- outside by pond
 - D. Option of sharing journal or excerpts inside (I volunteer mine first)
 - E. Homework: journal in a different place at home (due in 1 week)
 1. How does the change of setting impact your thoughts or feelings as you write?

II. Lesson Two: A Sense of Place

- A. Activator: Where do you feel most comfortable? Least comfortable? If you could be in any place, where would it be?
- B. 'Sense of Place' discussion
- C. Read O'Brien short story "Night Life" in class and annotate:
 - 1. How does the setting of the story impact the main character?
 - 2. How would the story or the main character be different if the events took place in a different setting?
- D. Class discussion of prompt questions above
- E. Homework: read "The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong" and complete reading questions

III. Lesson Three: How Place Changes Us

- A. Activator: Twitter Feed
- B. Discuss "Sweetheart" story reading questions- why does she change? Is her change for the better or worse?
- C. Literary Analysis Builder
- D. Paragraph Graphic Organizer
- E. Homework: read "On the Rainy River" and complete reading questions

IV. Lesson Four: Tim O'Brien and Civil Disobedience

- A. Activator: Do you agree with Tim O'Brien's statement: "I was a coward. I went to war"? Defend your yes or no answer.
- B. Discuss O'Brien's decision not to defect
- C. Read Thoreau's excerpted "Civil Disobedience" in groups:
 - 1. What does it mean to be civilly disobedient?
 - 2. Do you agree with Thoreau's justification of civil disobedience?
 - 3. What examples of civil disobedience can you identify from current events? Are these acts justified? Why or why not?
- D. Class T-Chart: defining civil disobedience

E. Homework: 'Place' journal due next class

V. Lesson Five: Place and Our Identity

A. Activator: journal entry reflection

B. Journal sharing

C. Class discussion- What similarities did you notice about where you chose to write or how your choice affected your journaling process?

D. Brainstorming activity- which places have affected you most in your life? (Question list)

E. Homework: Craft a personal narrative about one place from the brainstorming activity. Choose a place that had a significant impact on your life (whether it's exotic or local, a one-time visit or a place you go every day). How has that place impacted who you are as a person?

Lesson One: A Natural Education	
<u>Date:</u>	Monday, September 12th 50 minutes
<u>Context:</u>	This unit will begin at the outset of the school year, just after reviewing course expectations and the requirements for the year-long Senior Thesis project. I am hoping to have nice weather on this day to evoke the peace and freedom of summer for students as a way of drawing them in before the content of the year becomes more rigorous. I hope that this time frame will allow students to be more open and reflective in their journals, which will scaffold future college essay drafts.
<u>Objectives:</u>	Students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none">● write narratives to develop their thoughts on a given place by combining detailed description with internal reflection.● use rich, sensory language, active verbs, and present tense to convey a vivid picture of their momentary experiences.● thoughtfully reflect on what is experienced and observed during their journaling process. <p style="text-align: right;">Adapted from: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3</p>

Agenda:

A. Activator Prompt (10 minutes)

1. When students enter the room and take their seats, they will see a slide on the SMARTboard with the following quote:

“A river, with its waterfalls and meadows, a lake, a hill, a cliff or individual rocks, a forest and ancient trees standing singly. Such things are beautiful; they have a high use which dollars and cents never represent...such things educate far more than any hired teachers or preachers, or any at present recognized system of school education.” (Thoreau, *Journal XIV*: 304)

The slide will ask students to agree or disagree with Thoreau’s statement that nature is the best teacher. Their responses should consist of 3-5 complete sentences on a blank sheet of notebook paper.

2. Students will then turn and talk with a seat partner about what they wrote in response to the prompt, explaining why they agree or disagree with Thoreau’s statement.

B. Class discussion (5 minutes)

1. This discussion will broaden the turn and talk conversations for the whole class. I will ask students to volunteer what they thought of the quote, asking the following discussion questions:

- a) Do you find nature inspiring? Peaceful? Thought-provoking?
- b) Do you ever seek out nature and go outside just to experience it? If so, when?
- c) How does nature affect you? Are you calmer, more centered, or do you feel more ‘alive?’

Students may share their answers to these questions, which will also appear on the SMARTboard, in small groups or with the entire class.

C. Journaling activity (25 minutes)

1. I will explain our next activity, which will be to write a nature journal *while out in nature*. Students should start by **making observations about the natural world**- what do they see, hear, smell, or feel while they are outside? They should **choose at least one natural object**- a leaf, a rock, a blade of grass- and fixate on it, writing in as much detail about it as possible- the way it moves (or doesn’t), the way the light catches it, etc, trying to recreate the object as vividly as possible. I may provide a few brief examples with an object in the room, modeling vivid word choice and active verbs for the class and pointing out the difference between an obvious description (‘the rock is round’) and a more nuanced retelling (‘its many weather-beaten faces form

	<p>pinnacles and angles that are only visible up close, but seem to smooth out from farther away.’) Students should then reflect on their own thought process, physical being, or emotional state before the end of their journal. They should search for one way that nature reveals something about themselves- even if the connection seems tenuous.</p> <p>2. I will hand out blue exam booklets for this assignment. Students will bring their booklet, a pen or pencil, and a hard backing (like a textbook or binder) for writing against with them outside. Once we go outside by the pond in front of our school, students should find a quiet spot and write 2-5 pages in their blue books about what they see around them. After 20 minutes outside has passed, I will call them together and we will return to class.</p> <p>D. Journal sharing (10 minutes)</p> <p>1. When we come back into the classroom, I will tell students that they will be sharing their journals with a partner or in small groups. They can choose to either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Read what they have written word-for-word without commenting on their own writing, or b) Discuss the process of the activity more generally, without referring to any specific quotes from their journal. <p>Because I anticipate that some students may feel nervous about reading or discussing their writing so openly, I will start by reading my own nature journal entry aloud to them (I may have written this during the student activity or ahead of time). Students will then break off into pairs or groups to share their own experiences.</p>
<p><u>Homework/continuation:</u></p>	<p>Students will write another nature journal entry, this time at home. They may choose to write while outside or spend 15 minutes in an outdoor setting (WITHOUT their phones!) before coming inside to write immediately afterwards about their experience. Journal entries should be 2-5 blue book pages long, but do not need to be grammatically correct or proofread. They should just be a thoughtful, honest reflection of the experience of being in nature. This journal entry will be due 1 week from the day assigned (Monday, September 19th).</p>

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Lesson Two: A Sense of Place</h2>		
<p><u>Date:</u></p>	<p>Tuesday, September 13th</p>	<p>50 minutes</p>

<p><u>Context:</u></p>	<p>Seniors will typically be familiar with the processes of annotation and analysis already, but I like to review them in class at the beginning of the year to clarify my own expectations and give them some useful guidelines. This lesson will help set up my Seniors for the annotation of primary source texts throughout the year. I will also scaffold for more formal literary analysis with teacher think-alouds and group or partner work on guided questions.</p>
<p><u>Objectives:</u></p>	<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, especially with language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful ● analyze the impact of the author's choices, such as setting, plot, and character development, regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story <p style="text-align: right;">Adapted from: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12</p>
<p><u>Agenda:</u></p>	<p>A. <u>Activator Prompt (5 minutes)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will respond to the following warm-up prompt question on a blank sheet of paper: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Where do you feel most comfortable? Least comfortable? If you could be in any place, where would it be? (Somewhere familiar or new? Why?) Answer in 3-5 complete sentences. <p>B. <u>Class Discussion (10 minutes)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will volunteer what they wrote for the warm-up prompt at the start of this discussion. I will then broaden the discussion to the idea of 'sense of place' with the following discussion questions that students will respond to in an open forum: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Is there more to 'place' than just the physical setting of your surroundings? b) What other factors might affect your 'sense of place:' memory? Community? Emotion? c) How does your location impact how you act by yourself or interact with others? <p>I will ask students to consider and respond to these questions, providing my own examples when necessary to help get the conversation going.</p>

d) For instance, my grandmother's house has always been a place of nostalgia and fond memories of many past Christmases. However, this past summer, my grandparents moved out of the house and into an assisted living facility, while my parents and I helped prepare their old house and possessions for an estate sale. The sight of my grandparent's usually familiar living space becoming dismantled was both strange and somewhat heartbreaking, and seemed to displace my preconceived associations with the location. This personal example shows that our idea of a 'place' often represents much more than just its physical location on a map.

C. Read and annotate "Night Life" (25 minutes)

1. As we begin to read Tim O'Brien's short story aloud, I will **model the process of annotation** for my students. Most students will already be familiar with this process, but I like to review it at the beginning of the year to clarify my expectations. Students will be given a **handout** listing the following annotation strategies:

- **Personal experiences** you are reminded of
- Visual or sensory **images** you are experiencing
- Questions or "**wonderings**" that pop into your head
- **Predictions** about what might happen next
- Parts that seem especially **important or interesting** and **WHY you think they are important**
- What you think the **purpose or message** is

We will read the first three paragraphs of the story aloud together, students looking at their own story printout. I will also project these first few paragraphs of the story on the SMARTboard. As I notice key descriptions of the setting or vivid word choice, I will model underlining these passages for my students and commenting on them in the margins.

2. Students will then continue reading and annotating the story on their own or in pairs. They must write a total of 8-10 questions or comments (I will formatively assess this process while walking around the room and scanning their pages as they work; alternately, you could collect the completed annotations at the end of the lesson). After they have finished reading and annotating, students will answer the following reading questions with a partner:

a) How does the setting of the story impact the main character?

	<p>b) How would the story or the main character be different if the events took place in a different setting?</p> <p>D. <u>Class discussion part II (10 minutes)</u></p> <p>1. After answering the reading questions with a partner, students will be called on to share some of their annotations and answers to the reading questions. This cold-calling will allow me to formatively assess the work that students have completed in class and help bring the conversation of ‘sense of place’ full circle, relating the importance of setting to the wartime environment of Tim O’Brien’s short stories.</p>
<p><u>Homework/continuation:</u></p>	<p>Students will read and annotate another Tim O’Brien story from <i>The Things They Carried</i> called “The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong” and answer the accompanying reading questions (due tomorrow, 9/14). Students should already have a copy of the book <i>The Things They Carried</i>, or a photocopy of the short story can be provided for those who do not.</p>

<p>Lesson Three: How Place Changes Us</p>	
<p><u>Date:</u></p>	<p>Wednesday, September 14th 80 minutes</p>
<p><u>Context:</u></p>	<p>Students will have read the short story “The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong” for homework and should have already answered the reading questions. I will check students’ question sheets at the beginning of the lesson for completion. We will use this longer story as a basis for more complex literary analysis, reviewing analytical and argumentative skills that students are already familiar with while applying them to a new text.</p>
<p><u>Objectives:</u></p>	<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write from the point of view of a character from the story, which requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement). ● Cite strong textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

- Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story.

Adapted from: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12

Agenda:

A. Activator: Twitter Feed (10 minutes)

1. Students will be asked to compose a ‘tweet’ from the perspective of one of the story’s characters using the online app Socrative. In 140 characters or less, students must summarize the character’s feelings about the events of the story. Students’ finished tweets can then be projected on the SMARTboard using the Socrative app. This activity helps students recall the events of last night’s reading with an amusing and creative warm-up exercise.

B. Class Discussion (25 minutes)

1. This discussion will expand on the idea of ‘sense of place’ from yesterday, examining more closely how place can change our self-perception and behaviors. Using the reading questions as a basis, students will volunteer or be called on to share their reactions to the story:
 - a) Describe the setting of the Song Tra Bong military compound. How does this setting set up the rest of the story?
 - b) How does the arrival of Mary Anne affect the atmosphere of the camp?
 - c) How does the environment of Vietnam and the war change Mary Anne? Do you think she loses herself or finds herself over the course of the story? Why? Choose one, and defend your answer with a quote from the story.
2. For this third question, students will be asked to ‘stand and deliver’ regarding their answer. Students who wrote that Mary Anne has ‘lost’ herself to the environment will stand on one side of the room; students who wrote that she instead ‘found’ her true self in the wilderness will stand on the opposite side of the room. Students will then use their textual evidence and analysis from the homework sheet to debate with each other. This question can also be phrased differently to change the tone and student perspective of the debate:
 - a) Why does Mary Anne change? Is her change for the better or worse?
3. The last question of the homework sheet reveals the importance of fiction in our lives: the universal truth that they represent:

- a) Rat Kiley insists on the truth of the story, saying, “You don't believe it? ... Fine with me. But you don't know human nature. You don't know Nam.” What does the story reveal about human nature and the environment?

Students will be asked to brainstorm a list of ‘truths’ about society or human nature that the story makes apparent, such as “our environment defines us” or “nature is more powerful than nurture.” Students can then refer to this list for the next activity.

C. Literary Analysis Builder (15 minutes)

1. As a way to try and discover the story’s universal truth, students will choose a passage that they found particularly vivid or meaningful from the text. By completing the “Literary Analysis Builder” handout, students will examine the passage closely for figurative language, symbolism, and tone. They will then question the author’s intention for writing the passage in this way, connecting the author’s craft to the intended meaning or message for the story. This activity scaffolds literary analysis on a larger scale for my students by breaking the process down into concrete, manageable steps.

D. Analytical Paragraph Outline (25 minutes):

1. Once they have finished the analysis builder, students will be given a copy of the “perfect paragraph” graphic organizer. This outline will help students draft a complete analytical paragraph around the passage they have chosen. Paragraph writing should be review for most of my students, but when necessary, I can elaborate on each step of the paragraph process. For instance:
 - a) Topic sentences should be argumentative points, not facts:
 - Tim O’Brien wrote *The Things They Carried* about his experience during the Vietnam War (FACT, needs revising).
 - Tim O’Brien’s short story “The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong” fits into the narrative of his larger collection by revealing the darker side of human nature that lies within us all. (POINT)
 - b) Context (step 2) should explain what is happening in the story when the chosen quotation takes place.
 - c) Quotations should be woven into a sentence and cited correctly according to MLA format (O’Brien 45). Students will be given a handout on the four ways to grammatically integrate a quotation into a sentence. They can choose one of the four methods (comma weave,

	<p>colon weave, flow weave, or block quote) to integrate their chosen quotation into a complete sentence on the graphic organizer.</p> <p>d) The analysis step of the paragraph will include their observations and conclusions drawn from the literary analysis builder sheet. Students should refer to specific words and aspects of the quotation to answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why is this quotation important? ○ How does this quotation prove the topic claim? <p>e) Concluding sentences should relate the evidence and analysis back to the topic claim of the paragraph.</p> <p>E. <u>Summarizer (5 minutes):</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At the end of the class period, students will write one question that they have about the paragraph structure or drafting process on their paragraph outline before handing it in for a classwork grade. These outlines are a great formative assessment of the writing process, which can later develop into a formal writing assignment if desired.
<p><u>Homework/continuation:</u></p>	<p>Students will read and annotate another Tim O’Brien story from <i>The Things They Carried</i> called “On the Rainy River” and answer the accompanying reading questions (due tomorrow, 9/15). Students should already have a copy of the book <i>The Things They Carried</i>, or a photocopy of the short story can be provided for those who do not.</p>

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Lesson Four: Tim O’Brien and Civil Disobedience</h2>	
<p><u>Date:</u></p>	<p>Thursday, September 15th 50 minutes</p>
<p><u>Context:</u></p>	<p>Students will have read the short story “On the Rainy River” for homework, which I will check for completion briefly during the warm-up activator. This story shares several themes with Thoreau’s critical essay “Civil Disobedience.” Students will previously be familiar with the works of Henry David Thoreau from American Literature last year, including “Civil Disobedience.” By excerpting key passages from Thoreau’s essay and presenting it in a new context, students will be able to synthesize these two different historical time periods and authors, developing mastery of this higher-order thinking process.</p>

<p><u>Objectives:</u></p>	<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analyze how the sequence and scope of the Vietnam War affects the characters and message of O'Brien's narrative, paying close attention to perspective. ● Integrate and evaluate multiple sources (both O'Brien and Thoreau) in order to characterize the idea of civil disobedience. <p style="text-align: right;">Adapted from: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12</p>
<p><u>Agenda:</u></p>	<p>A. <u>Activator Prompt (5 minutes):</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will respond to the following warm-up prompt question on a warm-up sheet, which will be distributed on each desk at the beginning of the lesson: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Do you agree with Tim O'Brien's statement: "I was a coward. I went to war"? Defend your yes or no answer below in 2-3 complete sentences. <p style="margin-left: 40px;">This warm-up prompt will become a jumping-off point for the subsequent class discussion.</p> <p>B. <u>Class Discussion (15 minutes)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After responding to the warm-up prompt question, students will 'stand and deliver' to defend their standpoints. Students who agreed with the author's statement will stand on one side of the room, opposite from those who disagreed. Students will then use their textual evidence and analysis from the reading and homework questions to debate with each other, defending their answers to the warm-up prompt. 2. The class discussion will continue by examining the broader implications of O'Brien's perceived cowardice. In order for students to determine whether the narrator Tim is a coward for going to war, they will have to consider the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) What is the meaning of courage? b) Is the narrator's desire to evade the draft by going to Canada is more personally or politically motivated: does he care more about saving himself or the injustice of his country? c) From whose point of view are Tim's actions seen as cowardice? Heroism? Whose viewpoint matters more? d) Would you have acted as Tim did in the story? What would you have done differently, if anything? Or is it impossible to predict

your actions until you are faced with such a momentous decision yourself?

I will ask students to use their responses to the reading questions as a jumping off point for their ideas about this story, but I also like to let the discussion proceed organically from there. As students chime in with their ideas, related topics or philosophical ideas may also come into play. Personal and real-world examples of courage, embarrassment, or difficult decisions are always encouraged to make the discussion topic more immediate and relevant.

C. Read Thoreau's excerpted "Civil Disobedience" (20 minutes)

1. I will begin this next activity with a brief discussion of the social and political landscape of the Vietnam War. By 1965, "draft card burning or tearing-up became a common practice and was perceived as the first kind of protests against the Vietnam War" (Rohn). Many students began protesting the draft due to its high casualties, moral ambiguity, and the American disconnect from the reasons for our involvement in the war itself. O'Brien displays evidence of this mindset in his short story:
 - a) "The American war in Vietnam seemed to me wrong. Certain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons. I saw no unity of purpose, no consensus on matters of philosophy or history or law. The very facts were shrouded in uncertainty: Was it a civil war? A war of national liberation or simple aggression? Who started it, and when, and why?" (O'Brien 37).

I will likely reread this quotation for my students as a set up for many of the ideals espoused in Thoreau's work, "Civil Disobedience."

2. Students will be given the Thoreau excerpts handout to work on with partners or in small groups. They will review the key passages from Thoreau's essay and consider them in the context of the Vietnam War and Tim O'Brien's story. Using Thoreau's text, students will consider questions such as:
 - a) What does it mean to be civilly disobedient?
 - b) Do you agree with Thoreau's justification of civil disobedience?
 - c) What examples of civil disobedience can you identify from current events? Are these acts justified? Why or why not?

D. Summarizer: Class T-Chart (10 Minutes)

1. At the end of the group activity, each group will share their ideas to help complete a T-chart on big paper as a whole class. Students will help create a list of instances when civil disobedience IS or IS NOT justified.

	<p>a) Ex. Breaking the law to avoid harming another person (Fugitive Slave Act) would fall in the IS justified column.</p> <p>b) Threatening a police officer would NOT be considered justified.</p> <p>This chart paper can serve as a resource for the rest of the unit when discussing a moral or ethical quandary from a text or current event.</p>
<u>Homework/continuation:</u>	<p>Students' nature journals (assigned Monday, day one) will be due the next class, Monday, September 19th (as our class will 'drop' on Friday). They should write the journal by hand in their blue books or notebooks and remember to bring it to class for a 10 point grade on Monday.</p> <p>Reminder: Students may choose to write while outside or spend 15 minutes in an outdoor setting (WITHOUT their phones!) before coming inside to write immediately afterwards about their experience. Journal entries should be 2-5 blue book pages long, but do not need to be grammatically correct or proofread. They should just be a thoughtful, honest reflection of the experience of being in nature. This journal entry will be due 1 week from the day assigned (Monday, September 19th).</p>

Lesson Five: Place and Our Identity	
<u>Date:</u>	Monday, September 19th 50 minutes
<u>Context:</u>	<p>Students will now have completed two outdoor 'nature journal' entries, one during the first lesson and one for homework. At the culmination of this unit, students will build on the journaling process to write a final personal narrative reflecting on how a specific place or event has impacted their lives. This piece will become the foundation for a college application essay draft due at the end of September. Most students will need to write this essay in order to apply to college, so requiring them to reflect about the prompts for classwork will help them get credit for the work they will already complete, and possibly even motivate some students to apply to college with their essays assigned in class.</p>
<u>Objectives:</u>	<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and plot, to develop their experiences and events.
- Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the setting, events, and their experiences.

Adapted from CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3

Agenda:

A. Activator: Journal Reflection (10 minutes)

1. Students will reread their journal entry at the beginning of class and respond to the reflections questions provided:
 - a) When did you write your journal entry?
 - b) Where did you write it?
 - c) What physical descriptions stand out to you the most from your journal entry? (the weather, the sounds, the smells, etc.)
 - d) What other emotions, life events, or abstract ideas do you connect to over the course of your journal entry?
 - e) Did you enjoy the process of journaling? Why or why not? What did you find easy or difficult about writing this journal?

B. Journal Sharing (15 minutes):

1. In groups of no more than four, students can choose to either:
 - a) Read what they have written word-for-word without commenting on their own writing, or
 - b) Discuss the process of the activity more generally, without referring to any specific quotes from their journal.

Each member of the group should have a chance to share their writing or process with their group members. Students may give positive, constructive feedback to their peers in a respectful way.

C. Class discussion (10 minutes)

1. Over the course of the group journal sharing, students may have noticed commonalities between their journal entries or the writing process more generally. As a whole class, we will discuss:
 - a) What similarities did you notice about where you chose to write or how your choice affected your journaling process?
 - b) How might journaling be helpful to you in your lives outside of school?

- c) What aspects of your classmates' journals were most effective in telling a story or revealing a larger truth?

I often recommend stream-of-consciousness style journal writing as a way to help students relieve anxiety and release inner emotions, especially if they have difficulty 'turning their brains off' at night. This discussion will help bring the Thoreauvian idea of 'place' and techniques observed in Tim O'Brien's writing style full circle for the unit.

D. Brainstorming activity (15 minutes)

1. Students will complete this brainstorming activity individually, based on their own personal experiences. I will provide students with a list of places that they could describe, including:
 - a) A place where you feel most at home
 - b) A place where you accomplished an ambition
 - c) A place where you helped a friend or stranger
 - d) A place where you overcame a great physical or emotional struggle
 - e) A place where you experienced a moment of joy or beauty
 - f) A place where you wish you could have changed your words or actions
 - g) A place where you would most like to be at this very moment

Students will describe at least 5 out of 14 possible scenes, then choose one to elaborate on in detail for the personal narrative assignment for homework.

**Homework/
continuation:**

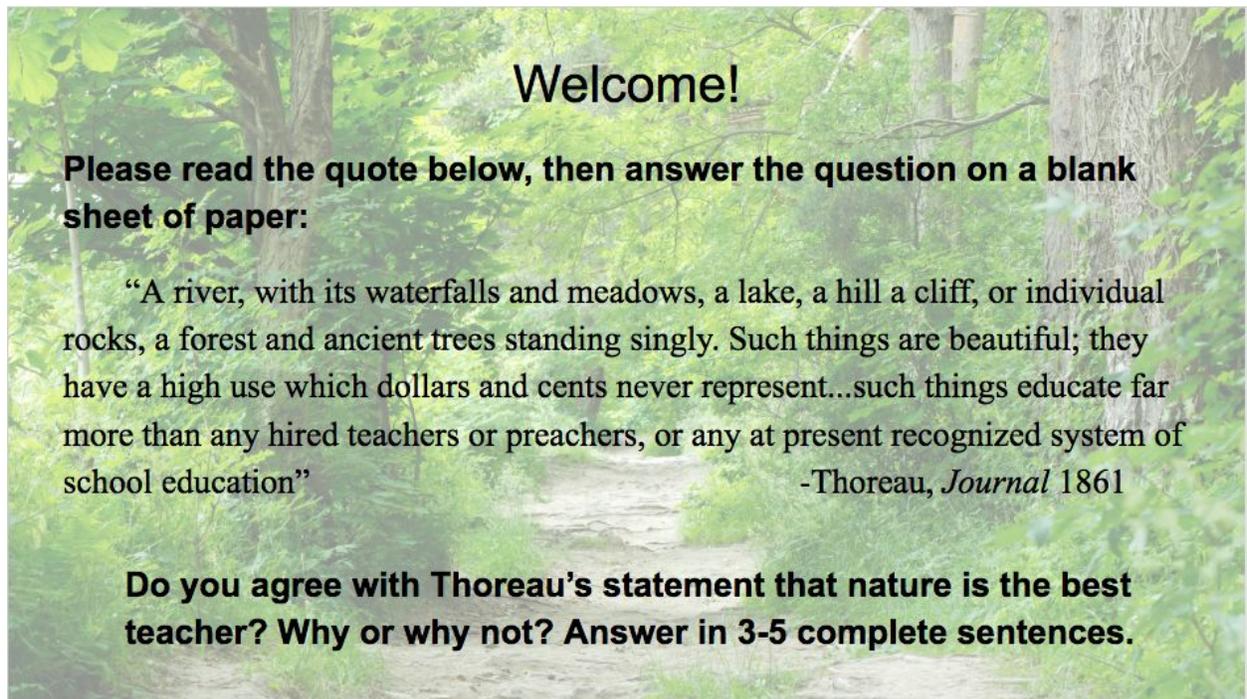
Assignment: Write a personal narrative about one place from the brainstorming activity. Choose a place that had a significant impact on your life (whether it's exotic or local, a one-time visit or a place you go every day). How has that place impacted who you are as a person today? This assignment, unlike the journal entries, must be typed and proofread prior to submission.

Students should think about the structure of their narrative, how they describe and represent the setting, and the flow of events in their story (all elements we have examined with Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*). They may also refer to the rubric for guidelines on the writing and revision process (25 points).

Materials:

Lesson One Materials:

- A **SMARTBoard** will be necessary for projecting the activator prompt.
- **Blue books** (or other personal notebooks) should be handed out for the journaling activity.
- Students should have access to some **outdoor space** for this lesson on a day with nice weather.



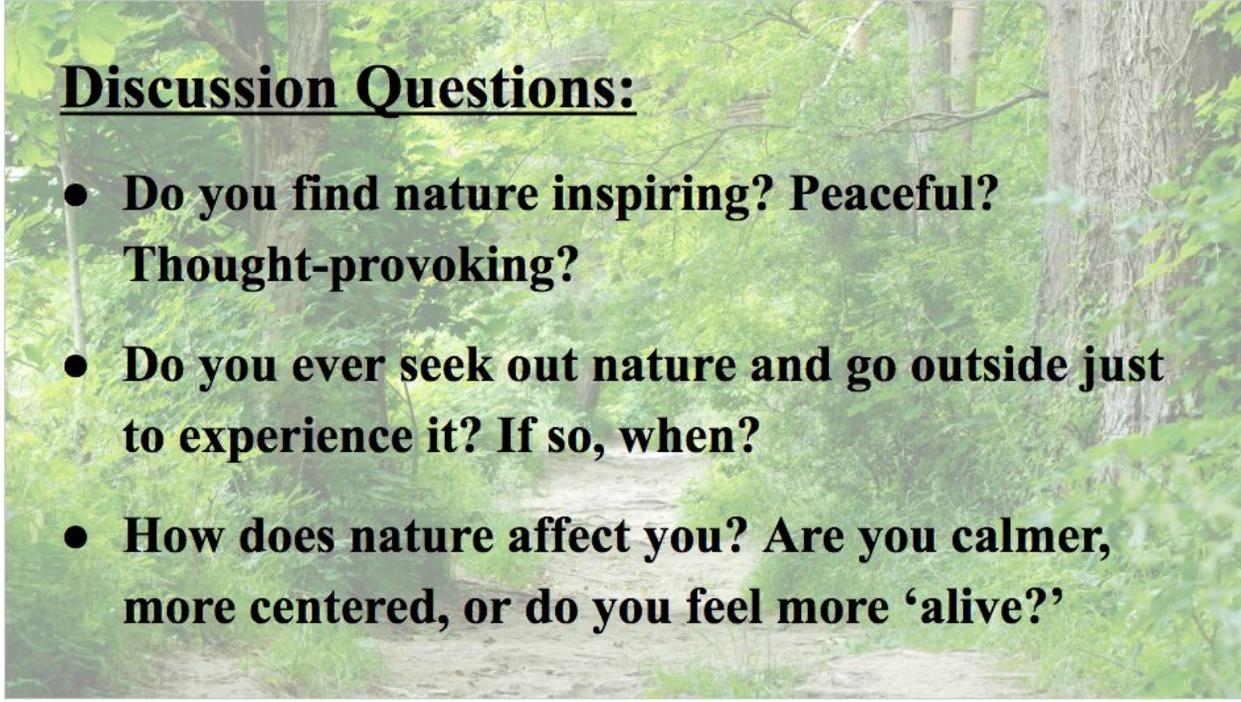
Welcome!

Please read the quote below, then answer the question on a blank sheet of paper:

“A river, with its waterfalls and meadows, a lake, a hill a cliff, or individual rocks, a forest and ancient trees standing singly. Such things are beautiful; they have a high use which dollars and cents never represent...such things educate far more than any hired teachers or preachers, or any at present recognized system of school education”

-Thoreau, *Journal* 1861

Do you agree with Thoreau’s statement that nature is the best teacher? Why or why not? Answer in 3-5 complete sentences.



Discussion Questions:

- **Do you find nature inspiring? Peaceful? Thought-provoking?**
- **Do you ever seek out nature and go outside just to experience it? If so, when?**
- **How does nature affect you? Are you calmer, more centered, or do you feel more ‘alive?’**

Lesson One Homework:

Nature Journal

Thoreau wrote the following about his experience in the woods by Walden Pond:

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

In the midst of the busy turmoil of our daily lives, we should all take a few moments for ourselves to commune with the natural world in a personal way.

Your task is to take 15 minutes out of your busy, 21st century lives by taking a stroll through nature and considering its value and connection to your own life. Open yourself to the natural world around you to learn more about yourself. You should do this **alone**— leave the cell phone at home— and enjoy the silence and spirituality of your journey. Live in the moment; leave the stresses of your day behind and focus on what you are experiencing now, in front of you. Reflect on your surroundings— trees, rocks, animals, plants— and ponder how they are connected to you, or how the natural world reflects something truthful about yourself. Think about the people that have come to this spot before you and the people that will come after you. Perhaps look up

at the night sky filled with stars and planets and meditate on the incomprehensible largeness of the universe, and your short yet meaningful existence in it.

The assignment:

10 points

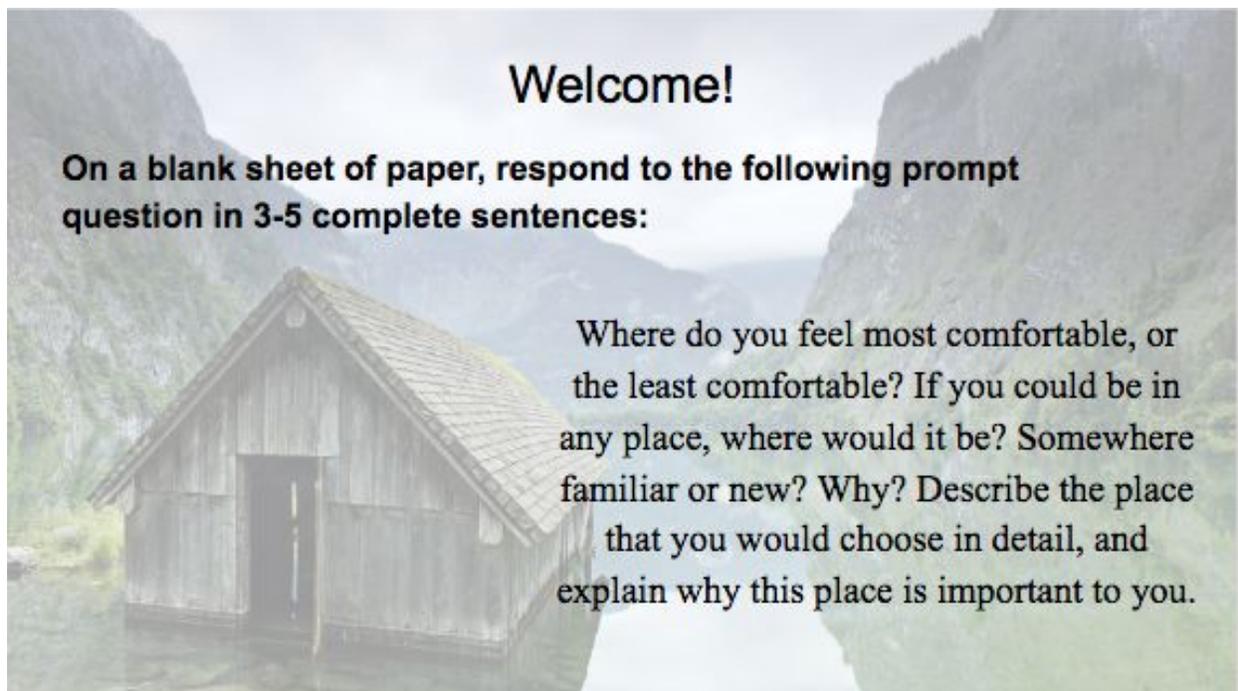
Go for a walk, by yourself, for about 15 minutes or so and find an interesting or comfortable spot in nature.

Write a 2-5 page journal entry in your blue books on your experience in nature (either while you are outside or right after you come back). Explain what you might have observed or learned from your thoughtful stroll—what images stick out in your mind? How might you connect these images with your own life? Write in first-person, present tense voice, creating vivid detail and sensory descriptions about the place where you are, and what that place means to you.

Go forth!

Lesson Two Materials:

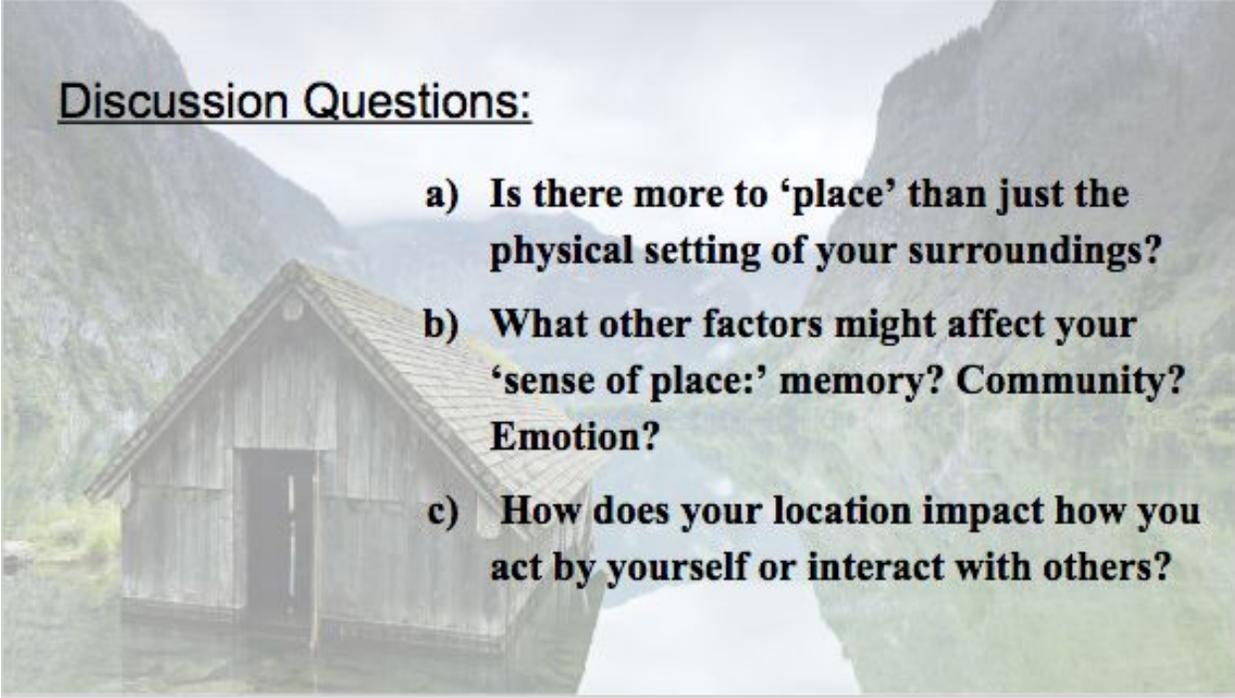
- A **SMARTBoard** will be necessary for projecting the activator prompt and short story for annotation modeling.
- Students will need one copy of each of the handouts and homework sheets.



Welcome!

On a blank sheet of paper, respond to the following prompt question in 3-5 complete sentences:

Where do you feel most comfortable, or the least comfortable? If you could be in any place, where would it be? Somewhere familiar or new? Why? Describe the place that you would choose in detail, and explain why this place is important to you.

A photograph of a rustic wooden cabin with a gabled roof, situated in a lush green valley. The cabin is the central focus, with a dark doorway. In the background, there are steep, forested mountains under a slightly overcast sky. The image has a soft, slightly faded appearance, serving as a background for the text.

Discussion Questions:

- a) **Is there more to ‘place’ than just the physical setting of your surroundings?**
- b) **What other factors might affect your ‘sense of place:’ memory? Community? Emotion?**
- c) **How does your location impact how you act by yourself or interact with others?**

Lesson Two Handouts:

Annotation: The process of adding critical commentary to a text as you read. Allows you to ENGAGE with the text on a critical level.

Annotations can be:

- **Personal experiences** you are reminded of
- Visual or sensory **images** you are experiencing
- Questions or “**wonderings**” that pop into your head
- **Predictions** about what might happen next
- Parts that seem especially **important or interesting** and **WHY you think they are important**
- What you think the **purpose or message** is

While reading, you should UNDERLINE passages that seem important to you or stick out to you. Then, write your comments in the margins of the paper about these passages.

“Night Life”

Tim O’Brien, 1990

Directions: As you read, underline key passages in the text- words and sentences that strike you as particularly vivid or significant. After you read, you will be given time to go back to these underlined passages and write 8-10 comments or questions about the text based on your observations.

A few words about Rat Kiley. I wasn't there when he got hurt, but Mitchell Sanders later told me the essential facts. Apparently he lost his cool.

The platoon had been working an AO out in the foothills west of Quang Ngai City, and for some time they'd been receiving intelligence about an NVA buildup in the area. The usual crazy rumors: massed artillery and Russian tanks and whole divisions of fresh troops. No one took it seriously, including Lieutenant Cross, but as a precaution the platoon moved only at night, staying off the main trails and observing strict field SOPs. For almost two weeks, Sanders said, they lived the night life. That was the phrase everyone used: the night life. A language trick. It made things seem tolerable. How's the Nam treating you? one guy would ask, and some other guy would say, Hey, one big party, just living the night life.

It was a tense time for everybody, Sanders said, but for Rat Kiley it ended up in Japan. The strain was too much for him. He couldn't make the adjustment.

During those two weeks the basic routine was simple. They'd sleep away the daylight hours, or try to sleep, then at dusk they'd put on their gear and move out single file into the dark. Always a heavy cloud cover. No moon and no stars. It was the purest black you could imagine, Sanders said, the kind of clock-stopping black that God must've had in mind when he sat down to invent blackness. It made your eyeballs ache. You'd shake your head and blink, except you couldn't even tell you were blinking, the blackness didn't change. So pretty soon you'd get jumpy. Your nerves would go. You'd start to worry about getting cut off from the rest of the unit—alone, you'd think—and then the real panic would bang in and you'd reach out and try to touch the guy in front of you, groping for his shirt, hoping to Christ he was still there. It made for some bad dreams. Dave Jensen popped special vitamins high in carotene. Lieutenant Cross popped NoDoz. Henry Dobbins and Norman Bowker even rigged up a safety line between them, a long piece of string tied to their belts. The whole platoon felt the impact.

With Rat Kiley, though, it was different. Too many body bags, maybe. Too much gore.

At first Rat just sank inside himself, not saying a word, but then later on, after five or six days, it flipped the other way. He couldn't stop talking. Weird talk, too. Talking about bugs, for instance: how the worst thing in Nam was the goddamn bugs. Big giant killer bugs, he'd say, mutant bugs, bugs with fucked-up DNA, bugs that were chemically altered by napalm and

defoliants and tear gas and DDT. He claimed the bugs were personally after his ass. He said he could hear the bastards homing in on him.

Swarms of mutant bugs, billions of them, they had him bracketed. Whispering his name, he said—his actual name—all night long—it was driving him crazy.

Odd stuff, Sanders said, and it wasn't just talk. Rat developed some peculiar habits. Constantly scratching himself. Clawing at the bug bites. He couldn't quit digging at his skin, making big scabs and then ripping off the scabs and scratching the open sores.

It was a sad thing to watch. Definitely not the old Rat Kiley. His whole personality seemed out of kilter.

To an extent, though, everybody was feeling it. The long night marches turned their minds upside down; all the rhythms were wrong. Always a lost sensation. They'd blunder along through the dark, willy-nilly, no sense of place or direction, probing for an enemy that nobody could see. Like a snipe hunt, Sanders said. A bunch of dumb Cub Scouts chasing the phantoms. They'd march north for a time, then east, then north again, skirting the villages, no one talking except in whispers. And it was rugged country, too. Not quite mountains, but rising fast, full of gorges and deep brush and places you could die. Around midnight things always got wild. All around you, everywhere, the whole dark countryside came alive. You'd hear a strange hum in your ears. Nothing specific; nothing you could put a name on. Tree frogs, maybe, or snakes or flying squirrels or who-knew-what. Like the night had its own voice—that hum in your ears—and in the hours after midnight you'd swear you were walking through some kind of soft black protoplasm, Vietnam, the blood and the flesh.

It was no joke, Sanders said. The monkeys chattered death-chatter. The nights got freaky. Rat Kiley finally hit a wall.

He couldn't sleep during the hot daylight hours; he couldn't cope with the nights.

Late one afternoon, as the platoon prepared for another march, he broke down in front of Mitchell Sanders. Not crying, but up against it. He said he was scared. And it wasn't normal scared. He didn't know what it was: too long in-country, probably. Or else he wasn't cut out to be a medic. Always policing up the parts, he said. Always plugging up holes. Sometimes he'd stare at guys who were still okay, the alive guys, and he'd start to picture how they'd look dead. Without arms or legs—that sort of thing. It was ghoulish, he knew that, but he couldn't shut off the pictures. He'd be sitting there talking with Bowker or Dobbins or somebody, just marking time, and then out of nowhere he'd find himself wondering how much the guy's head weighed, like how heavy it was, and what it would feel like to pick up the head and carry it over to a chopper and dump it in.

Rat scratched the skin at his elbow, digging in hard. His eyes were red and weary.

"It's not right," he said. "These pictures in my head, they won't quit. I'll see a guy's liver. The actual fucking liver. And the thing is, it doesn't scare me, it doesn't even give me the willies. More like curiosity. The way a doctor feels when he looks at a patient, sort of mechanical, not seeing the real person, just a ruptured appendix or a clogged-up artery."

His voice floated away for a second. He looked at Sanders and tried to smile.

He kept clawing at his elbow.

"Anyway," Rat said, "the days aren't so bad, but at night the pictures get to be a bitch. I start seeing my own body. Chunks of myself. My own heart, my own kidneys. It's like—I don't know—it's like staring into this huge black crystal ball. One of these nights I'll be lying dead out there in the dark and nobody'll find me except the bugs—I can see it—I can see the goddamn bugs chewing tunnels through me—I can see the mongooses munching on my bones. I swear, it's too much. I can't keep seeing myself dead."

Mitchell Sanders nodded. He didn't know what to say. For a time they sat watching the shadows come, then Rat shook his head.

He said he'd done his best. He'd tried to be a decent medic. Win some and lose some, he said, but he'd tried hard. Briefly then, rambling a little, he talked about a few of the guys who were gone now, Curt Lemon and Kiowa and Ted Lavender, and how crazy it was that people who were so incredibly alive could get so incredibly dead.

Then he almost laughed.

"This whole war," he said. "You know what it is? Just one big banquet. Meat, man. You and me. Everybody. Meat for the bugs."

The next morning he shot himself.

He took off his boots and socks, laid out his medical kit, doped himself up, and put a round through his foot.

Nobody blamed him, Sanders said.

Before the chopper came, there was time for goodbyes. Lieutenant Cross went over and said he'd vouch that it was an accident. Henry Dobbins and Azar gave him a stack of comic books for hospital reading. Everybody stood in a little circle, feeling bad about it, trying to cheer him up with bullshit about the great night life in Japan.

Reading Questions: Use your observations and annotations to help you answer the following questions:

2. How does the setting of the story impact the main character?
3. How would the story or the main character be different if the events took place in a different setting?

Lesson Two Homework:

“The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong”
Reading and Discussion Questions

Read and annotate the short story “The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong” in Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* (pages 85-110). Then, answer the following questions with 1-3 complete sentences each in preparation for tomorrow’s discussion. Some questions may ask you to defend your answer with quotations from the text.

1. Describe the setting of the Song Tra Bong military compound. How does this setting set up the rest of the story?
2. How does the arrival of Mary Anne affect the atmosphere of the camp?
3. How does the environment of Vietnam and the war change Mary Anne? Do you think she loses herself or finds herself over the course of the story? Why? Choose one, and defend your answer with a quote from the story.
4. Rat Kiley insists on the truth of the story, saying, “You don't believe it? ... Fine with me. But you don't know human nature. You don't know Nam.” What does the story reveal about human nature and the environment?

Lesson Three Materials:

- Students should all bring their copy of *The Things They Carried* to class.
- Students should have access to an iPad, laptop, or even a cell phone and be logged into the Socrative app.
- A **SMARTBoard** will be necessary for projecting the results of the Socrative twitter feed activator.
- Students will need one copy of each of the handouts and homework sheets.

Socrative (online prompt activity):

"Whatever you say, Sweetheart"

1. Choose a character from last night's reading (Mary Anne Bell, Mark Fossie, Eddie Diamond, Rat Kiley, Mitchell Sanders, one of the 'greenies,' Tim O'Brien, etc.). Give this character a twitter handle (@MaryAnne or @SweaterBelle) and compose a tweet from this character's point of view about the events of the story "The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong." Your tweet can be no longer than 140 characters and should represent the perspective of your chosen character. You may also include whatever hashtags you feel are appropriate for the tone of your tweet.

@_____:

Lesson Three Handouts:

Literary Analysis Builder

Step 1: Pick a passage

Copy a passage in the space below (2-6 sentences)*:

Step 2: Make Observations

Annotate your passage above by underlining key words and phrases that jump out at you. Then answer the following questions:

1. What do you find **interesting** about the passage? Why did you choose it?
2. What is the **tone** of the passage? (ex. "nostalgic," "whimsical," "playful," "depressed," etc.)
How do you know?

3. Are there any **patterns, symbols, or figurative language** in the passage that you notice? (*These could be repeated words, objects, or colors, imagery, metaphors, or important dialogue*).

Step 3: Ask Questions

Ask yourself WHY the author would write the passage in this way- what might be the reason for creating the structure, images, patterns, or ideas you observed above?*

**THEN, try to answer the questions you posed above by making an educated guess, or hypothesis. The answer is your analysis!*

Perfect Paragraph: 5 Steps to Success!

<p><u>STEP 1:</u> <u>Topic Sentence</u> State the point of paragraph as an argumentative claim</p>	
<p><u>STEP 2: Context</u> Offer background information concerning topic</p>	
<p><u>STEP 3: Quote</u> Introduce quote (must be woven into a sentence!) or supporting evidence</p>	
<p><u>STEP 4: Analysis</u> 1. Analyze the quote 2. Explain the relevance of the quote to your topic: Why is this quote important? How does this quote prove the topic claim?</p> <p>(most important part of your paragraph)</p>	
<p><u>STEP 5:</u> <u>Concluding Sentence</u> 1. Relate quote back to thesis statement!</p> 	

Integrating Quotations into Your Writing

A **quote weave** is a way to integrate a quote into your writing seamlessly. There are several different ways to do this, which are outlined on this sheet. Use this resource as a guideline on writing assignments to help you efficiently and accurately incorporate textual quotations into your analysis. What we want to AVOID is just plopping a quote into the middle of a paragraph as its own sentence.

- **WRONG:** Old Major believes that Man is the cause of all of the animals' problems. "Remove Man from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever" (Orwell 7). This quote justifies his decision that the animals should revolt.
- **RIGHT:** Old Major believes that Man is the cause of the animals' problems. He urges that if they "remove Man from the scene ... the root cause of hunger and overwork [will be] abolished for ever," justifying his decision that the animals should revolt (Orwell 7).

The following four methods can all be used to weave quotes into your sentences.

Method #1: Integrating a quote using a colon

You can introduce a quote using a colon by linking it to a relevant analytical point. This is the recommended method for including a quotation of more than one sentence.

- Ex. Old Major identifies Man as the root of the animals' problems: "It is summed up in a single word—Man. Man is the only real enemy we have" (Orwell 7)

Method #2: Integrating a quote using a comma

You can introduce the speaker or author of a quote using a comma.

- Ex. Old Major states, "Man is the only creature that consumes without producing" (Orwell 7-8).

You can also use a comma for a brief lead-in to the text.

- As the animals recall, "there was a definite ruling against beds" (Orwell 79).

You can also divide a quote in the middle using commas. Always put commas on the INSIDE of quotations marks.

- Ex. "Comrades," Old Major declares, "you have heard already about the strange dream that I had last night" (Orwell 6).

Method #3: the 'Flow Quote'

In a flow quote, you are seamlessly weaving the quotation into your analysis of it. A flow quote must include all parts of a sentence and be grammatically correct. This is the most sophisticated way of incorporating a quotation into your argument.

- Ex. Although Old Major believes that "All habits of Man are evil," the pigs later come to resemble the very humans which they have overthrown (Orwell 11).
- Eventually, "it did not seem strange" to the animals that the pigs were acting like humans, "not even when the pigs took Mrs. Jones's clothes out of the wardrobes and put them on" (Orwell 135).

Method #4: Block quote

You may include a quotation that occupies four lines or more of text into your analysis when it is absolutely necessary. To include this long block of text, you must first introduce it with a colon, begin on the following line, and indent the ENTIRE block of text by one tab space on either side (use the ruler at the top of your word processor to do this). You must OMIT THE QUOTATION MARKS and include a parenthetical citation AFTER the period. This is a very tricky maneuver and should be avoided whenever possible, UNLESS you feel that the entire block quotation is NECESSARY for the integrity of your argument.

- Ex. The song *Beasts of England* inspires the animals to envision a time when all humans will be banished and the animals will rule themselves:
 Soon or late the day is coming,
 Tyrant Man shall be o'erthrown,
 And the fruitful fields of England
 Shall be trod by beasts alone. (Orwell 5-8)

Tips on integrating quotes:

- Do NOT put ellipses IN FRONT of a quotation, even if the front is missing.
- Do NOT put ellipses AT THE END of a quotation, even if the back is missing.
- Always put the period OUTSIDE of your quotation marks, AFTER the citation.
- If your quote ends in a question mark or an exclamation point, include it inside the quotation marks, but still follow your citation with a period:
 - Ex: Old Major asks, "Is it not crystal clear, comrades, that all the evils of this life of ours spring from the tyranny of human beings?" (Orwell 9).
- ALWAYS make the mixture of the author's words and your words grammatically correct.
- Use only the most valuable parts of a quotation. Indicate any omitted part of a quotation using an ellipsis (...).
 - Ex. The men seem about to overpower the animals during the battle when "suddenly, at a squeal from Snowball, ... all the animals turned and fled through the gateway into the yard" (Orwell 41).
- Lines of verse should be separated by using a slash mark (/) with no spaces. Cite line numbers instead of page numbers.
 - Ex. "Beasts of every land and clime/Harken to my joyful tidings/Of the golden future time" (Orwell 2-4).
- If you need to insert a word of your own, or if you need to change a letter in order to make the sentence grammatically correct, use brackets [].
 - Ex. "[Napoleon] walked heavily round the shed, looked closely at every detail of the plans and snuffed at them once or twice ... then suddenly he lifted his leg, urinated over the plans, and walked away without uttering a word" (Orwell 50).
- If you are quoting dialogue, then use single quotation marks to set off the inner quote.*
 - Benjamin, "when asked whether he was not happier now that Jones was gone, ... would say only 'Donkey's live a long time'" (Orwell 30).

***NOTE:** If your quotation is ENTIRELY dialogue, then you do NOT need to include extra quotation marks.

Remember to only use quotes that support your argument in a necessary way. A quotation should poignantly illustrate one of the main points of your analysis by supporting a claim or validating a statement.

Lesson Three Homework:

“On the Rainy River” Reading and Discussion Questions

Read and annotate the short story “On the Rainy River” from Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* (pages 37-58). Then answer the following questions with 1-3 complete sentences each in preparation for tomorrow’s discussion. Some questions may ask you to defend your answer with quotations from the text.

1. Why do you think the narrator would say at the beginning, “This is one story I’ve never told before. Not to anyone. Not to my parents, not to my brother or sister, not even to my wife?” What first impressions about the story do you get from this statement?
2. What is the narrator’s definition of courage? Would you define courage in the same way? Why or why not?
3. Do you think the narrator’s desire to evade the draft by going to Canada is more personally or politically motivated: does he care more about saving himself or the injustice of his country? Choose one, and then defend your answer with one quotation from the text.
4. Why doesn’t the narrator jump overboard and swim to the safety of Canada? Why does he decide to go to war?
5. At one point, the narrator asks, “What would you do? Would you jump? Would you feel pity for yourself? Would you think about your family and your childhood and your dreams and all you’re leaving behind? Would it hurt? Would it feel like dying? Would you cry, as I did?” Put yourself in his circumstances and imagine you are faced with the same choice: what decision would you make? Why?

Lesson Four Materials:

- Students should all bring their copy of *The Things They Carried* to class.
- Students will need one copy of each of the warm-up prompt and “Civil Disobedience” excerpts.
- One sheet of large chart paper or giant post-it paper will be needed for the T-chart at the end of the lesson:

Civil Disobedience...*	
<u>IS justified when.....</u>	<u>Is NOT justified when....</u>

***Students will help create this master list based on their reading and group work at the end of the lesson.**

Lesson Four Handouts:

Warm-up 9/15: Do you agree with Tim O’Brien’s statement: “I was a coward. I went to war”? Defend your yes or no answer in 2-3 complete sentences below:

Henry David Thoreau- excerpts from: “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”

“I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe--"That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.”

Thoreau says, “That government is best which governs least”? Do you agree or disagree with his statement? Why?

“This American government – what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity? It has not the vitality and force of a single living man; for a single man can bend to its will. It is a sort of wooden gun to the people themselves. But it is not the less necessary for this; for the people must have some complicated machinery or other, and hear its din, to satisfy the idea of government which they have. Governments show thus how successfully men can be imposed on, even impose on themselves for their full advantage. It is excellent, we must all allow. Yet this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. It does not keep the country free. It does not settle the West. It does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way...”

According to Thoreau, does who has done more for the United States: government or individual citizens? Do you agree or disagree?

“After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest. But a government in which the majority rule in all cases can not be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a government in which the majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?--in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right.”

What is a conscience? Why, according to Thoreau, does man not need government if he has a conscience? Do you agree or disagree?

Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Men, generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy is worse than the evil. It makes it worse. Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority? Why does it cry and resist before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage its citizens to put out its faults, and do better than it would have them? Why does it always crucify Christ and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels?

Thoreau thinks that we should amend unjust laws. But does he think that we should obey them until they are changed?

What is an example of an unjust law? Do you agree with Thoreau about obeying that law? Why?

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth--certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn...

What does, "What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn..." mean? Do you think this is too extreme of a view? Does one man's objections to an unjust law matter?

"I have paid no poll tax for six years. I was put into a jail once on this account, for one night; and, as I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up. I wondered that it should have concluded at length that this was the best use it could put me to, and had never thought to avail itself of my services in some way. I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax..."

Thoreau was jailed for refusing to pay a poll tax, as he believed that his money was going to fund the Mexican-American War, in which he did not believe. Do you have anything in your life that you would be willing to be jailed over? If no, why?

According to Thoreau, do you think that Tim O'Brien had a right to break the law by dodging the draft, if he had fled to Canada? Why or why not?

Lesson Five Materials:

- Students should bring their homework nature journals to class with them.
- Students will need one copy of each of all handouts for this lesson.

Lesson Five Handouts:

Warm-up: Nature Journal Reflection

Directions: Reread your journal entry, then briefly answer the following questions about your writing process and final product below:

- a) When did you write your journal entry?
- b) Where did you write it?
- c) What physical descriptions stand out to you the most from your journal entry? (the weather, the sounds, the smells, etc.)
- d) What other emotions, life events, or abstract ideas do you connect to in your journal entry?
- e) Did you enjoy the process of journaling? Why or why not? What did you find easy or difficult about writing this journal?

“Meaningful Places” —Personal Narrative Brainstorming

Directions: Describe places for at least five of the following criteria, then put a star next to one that contains a particularly vivid memory or experience. Your chosen place will become the basis of a more structured personal narrative about your individual experiences and ideals.

Describe a place where...

- You feel most at home:
- You feel loved and accepted:
- You feel purposeful:
- You have felt out of place, independent, or unique:
- You accomplished an ambition:
- You helped a friend or stranger:
- You experienced a failure:
- You overcame a great physical or emotional struggle:
- You experienced a moment of joy or beauty:
- You realized something about yourself:
- You would like to relive an experience over again:
- You wish you could have changed your words or actions:
- You wish you could be someday:
- You would most like to be at this very moment:

Personal Narrative Assignment (25 points):

Write a personal narrative about one place from the brainstorming activity above. Choose a place that had a significant impact on your life (whether it's exotic or local, a one-time visit or a place you go every day). How has that place impacted who you are as a person today? This

assignment, unlike the journal entries, must be typed and proofread prior to submission. Consider the following:

- The **structure** of your narrative (Will it have a beginning, middle, and end? How will you effectively transition between moments in time or space?)
- Use of **vivid and descriptive language**, including sensual language, active verbs, and metaphor
- Narrative **choices** such as point of view, dialogue, and plot- how will you make your story come to life on the page for your reader?
- **Reflective significance** of your writing: How did this event or location impact you as an individual? What does this story reveal about your character?

Review the literary style and techniques of Tim O'Brien in *The Things They Carried* for inspiration if you need it.

You may also refer to the rubric for guidelines on the writing and revision process.*

Due date: Monday, September 26th

***See rubric (next page) for detailed grading criteria**

Name: _____

Narrative Reflection Rubric

12 CP

Scoring Guide for Topic Development

	Weak - 2	Developing - 3	Competent - 4	Very Good - 5	Outstanding - 6
Idea Development	Poor support of thesis and topic sentences; little or no analysis of material; off topic	Minimal support of thesis and topic sentences; repeats ideas; minimal or flawed analysis of material; mostly off topic	Adequate support of thesis and topic sentences but could use more specific details and examples; satisfactory analysis of material; partially focused	Detailed support of thesis and topic sentences <i>but not as compelling as outstanding papers</i> ; accurate analysis of material; mostly focused	Rich, detailed support of thesis and topic sentences; examples engage the reader; sophisticated analysis of material; very focused
Audience & Purpose	Little awareness of audience or purpose; tone inconsistent (use of first/second person); no hook	Little awareness of audience but some awareness of purpose; tone sometimes inappropriate; cliché or humdrum hook	Aware of audience and purpose; tone appropriate; sufficient hook	Aware of audience and purpose; tone appropriate; hook ordinary rather than compelling	Clear awareness of audience and purpose; persuasive tone; compelling hook
Organization	Minimal organization; lacking introduction and conclusion as well as transitions	Attempted organization but may be lacking effective introduction; transitions missing; conclusion missing or ineffective	Adequately organized with defined introduction; boring transitions; adequate conclusion	Logically organized with defined introduction; transitions predictable, but effective; effective conclusion	Logically organized with highly effective introduction; smooth transitions; insightful conclusion
Sentence Structure	Sentence fragments and run-ons appear frequently; choppy and irregular flow	Sentences tend to be simple with some run-ons or fragments; awkward flow	Complete sentences with limited variation; adequate flow	Sentences are complete and varied; flow is smooth with few hitches	Sentences use length and pattern to enhance comprehension and flow
Word Choice	Word choice vague and repetitive with clichés, slang and potentially unsuitable vocabulary	Word choice simple and predictable; characterized by frequent repetitions and vague words	Word choice is familiar and adequate; verbs could be more vivid and specific	Word choice reflects strong vocabulary; some active verbs, sensory language is less consistent	Word choice is vivid and precise; writer uses sophisticated vocabulary, powerful verbs, and powerful sensory language

English Conventions

Fair - 1	Good - 2	Excellent - 3
Many errors in grammar, usage, mechanics or spelling; errors interfere with communication; too short	Errors in grammar, usage, mechanics or spelling; does not quite meet length requirement	Excellent control of grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling; meets length requirement

x2 = _____

Formatting Requirements

Adequate - 2	Excellent - 4
Few errors in formatting: margins/header/footer/spacing/other	No errors in formatting

x1 = _____

Comments:

_____/100

Rubric:

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Thoreau, Henry David. "Civil Disobedience" *The Portable Thoreau*. Ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer. New York: Penguin Books, 2012. 73-98. Print.