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Approaching Walden Curriculum Unit
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Places, People and Poetry: Thoreau and Literature

Introduction

I am entering my third year at Newton North High School, and, although I will not teach the English 11 class again this year, I have the privilege of teaching a class in the Special Education department that is made up of at-risk 11th and 12th grade students. . In this special education program, students complete most of the work in class (with one homework assignment per week, assigned early in the week, and due on Friday), and loop in the program from grade 11 to 12. This unit is designed for the “Links” class, so most of the school work is done in the class, with supports, and I have pulled excerpts from Thoreau, rather than having them read all of *Walden*. It will be the first unit of the year, which is why there is also some personal writing; it allows me to get to know the students and ease them back into writing with an easy subject (themselves!). My hope is that by connecting the concept of sense of place to themselves, they will be able to empathize with Thoreau, connect to his ideas, and understand the significance of *Walden* better.

The unit will last two weeks, or 10 class periods. Most of the lessons are during 55-minute classes, but some are during the weekly 75-minute classes.

Short Abstract of Curriculum Unit (3-6 sentences):

Prior to reading any of the texts this year, students will partake in a two-week unit to introduce them to one of the themes of the year: sense of place. The unit will pull excerpts from *Walden* to help students understand the basis for understanding a literal place as well as figurative place (state of mind). Students will examine their own senses of place through various types of writing and expression, others’ senses of place through the reading of Thoreau, poetry and songs, and the actual place of Walden through a field trip during the unit. The purposes of the unit are to help students understand the major theme of the year, so that they can apply it to each novel they will read, to examine their own lives in order to better empathize with characters in the novels they will read, and to understand the basis of American Literature: transcendentalism.

List of Reading Materials:

- Excerpts from *Walden*
- “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon
- “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” by W.B. Yeats (poem and recording)
- “Woodstock” by Joni Mitchell (poem and recording)
- “Please Come to Boston” by Kenny Chesney (recording)
- “Going to Walden” by Mary Oliver
- “I’m Coming Home” by Diddy and J. Cole (recording)
- Copy of newspaper for each student

List of Equipment (i.e. technology, scientific measurement tools, etc.):

- Laptop
- Overhead projector and Smartboard
- Speakers

State Standards:

R4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

RI7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

W9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

SL1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

L1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Places, People and Poetry: Thoreau and Literature

Lesson #1: Literal Sense of Place (75-minute Class)

Abstract (2-5 sentences):

This lesson comes after lessons offering a brief introduction to the ideas of transcendentalism and how Thoreau was a part of the literary movement. It will focus on the literal sense of place by allowing students the opportunity to practice observing, using all of their senses, and writing descriptively based on their observations.

Goals/Objectives:

- Students will be able to understand the term “deliberate” and how it connects to Thoreau’s ideas.
- Students will understand the concept of “sense of place.”
- Students will understand the term “imagery.”
- Students will spend time in the woods observing their surroundings and taking note of their sensory observations.
- Students will use their notes to write a descriptive paragraph.

Procedure/lesson plan:

1. (5 Minutes) Do Now: Respond to the following quotation: “Here I am at home. In the bare and bleached crust of the earth I recognize my friend” (Thoreau’s journal, volume XI). **Have you recognized any parts of the earth as your friend? Would you call nature home? Why or why not?**
2. (10 Minutes) Discussion of their responses and the quotation/Introduction to “sense of place.” Ask students what the difference between “place” and “sense of place” might be. Explain the importance of understanding the place in which something happens. For example, ask students to think about a significant moment in their lives. Then, ask if they remember the place in which it happened. Most of them probably will – ask why that is if I did not ask them to think of a place.

How did a sense of place impact your understanding of a novel or story you read last year? Students (it is a two-year program so most were in the course last year) will likely cite “Rappacini’s Daughter,” *Fahrenheit 451* as examples of stories in which a sense of the place was important to understand.

3. (10 Minutes) **Give students Thoreau’s passage:** “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. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.”

Students should discuss the passage with the people next to them, in response to the following questions: **What is his message? What does it mean to be deliberate? When was the last time you did something deliberately? What does it mean to suck out the marrow of life?** After pairs discuss the passage, they should each share an idea they discussed with the larger group.

4. (10 minute to walk each way, 20 minutes while in the woods) Tell students that today they will live deliberately, and develop their “friendships with the earth.” They will bring a journal with them, and walk, silently, to the nearby Cabot Woods. Once there, they will sit alone, silently, and take note of everything they observe around them. They must use each of their senses: smell, taste, touch, sight, sound.
5. (5 Minutes) Once back in the classroom, I will put the term, “imagery” on the board and explain that it is language appealing to the senses, or language that puts me in the imagined place of the writer. I will tell them that their homework due at the end of the week (the program’s policy is one homework assignment for the week, due at the end of it) is to write a paragraph, using their observational notes and all of their senses, in which they create an image of the place they observed. The second half of the homework assignment is that students must alter a route they take frequently and reflect – see attached.

Assessment:

- Students receive a daily participation grade out of 3 points.
- Paragraphs will be collected (attached to their notes) and graded based on the use of all senses to show an image, and on effort and thoughtfulness.

Places, People and Poetry: Thoreau and Literature
Lesson #2: Figurative Sense of Place

(55-minute Class)

Abstract (2-5 sentences):

This lesson comes soon after lesson #1, in which students observed their literal places in an effort to live deliberately. They will have debriefed the activity by considering how being deliberate in their observations allowed them to gain a better sense of place. In lesson #2, students will read George Ella Lyon's poem, "Where I'm From" and then write their own poetry to better understand the figurative concept of sense of place.

Goals/Objectives:

- Students will understand how a poet uses imagery to convey a theme in a poem.
- Students will reflect on their own "places," be able to write their own poems, and share with them their peers.
- Students will understand how the term "sense of place" extends beyond the literal place.

Procedure/lesson plan:

1. (10 Minutes) Do Now: students will respond to the following quotation: "A man is worth most to himself and to others, whether as an observer, or poet, or neighbor, or friend, where he is most himself, most contented and at home" (Journal, volume X). **What is Thoreau's message here? Do you agree or disagree? How do you define "home"?** Discuss their responses as a large group after they have time to write about it.
2. (10 Minutes) Hand out George Ella Lyon's poem, "Where I'm From" and have students listen while I read aloud. Then have them underline important images as they read it to themselves. Questions for large-group discussion: **what is Lyon's "place"? How does he develop his "sense of place"? What is missing? How is this sense of place unlike that we discussed a couple of days ago? What is "home" to him?**
3. (20-25 Minutes) Give the poetry assignment to students. They will have time in class to prepare their own "Where I'm From" poems, using the attached guidelines.
4. (10 Minutes) Students will read their poems to the class. Their peers will pick out details they heard that help the student poet define his/her sense of place (to ensure listening to each other as well).

Assessment:

- Students receive a daily participation grade out of 3 points.
- Poems will be graded based on adherence to the attached assignment.

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Lesson #3: Sense of Place in Poetry and Music (55-minute period)

Abstract (2-5 sentences):

This lesson comes right after lesson #2, in which students wrote poetry to portray their senses of place. The lesson focuses on analyzing the poetry and music of others to examine sense of place as well as the concept of place as sanctuary or mindset. They will be familiar with Thoreau's decision to live at Walden Pond from early lessons, and will have analyzed excerpts from his journals and *Walden* to start previous lessons. After reading Mary Oliver's poem, "Going to Walden," they will examine W.B. Yeats' poem "The Lake Isle of Innisfree."

Goals/Objectives:

- Students will understand the use of imagery in poetry to convey a theme.
- Students will be able to make parallels between various poems and songs.
- Students will be able to work in small groups to discuss poetry.

Procedure/lesson plan:

1. (10 Minutes) Do Now: While students walk into the room, the song "I'm Coming Home" by P.Diddy and J. Cole will be playing. The lyrics to the song will be on the board, along with the following questions: **how does the song connect to the concept of place we discussed in Lyon's poem yesterday? What qualities of home and a sense of place are expressed in the song? How does it connect to Thoreau's quotation from yesterday?**
2. (15 Minutes) I will ask a student to read Mary Oliver's poem, "Going to Walden," aloud to students. They will then reread the poem silently while marking up any images that stand out. They will be asked to write the message of the poem at the bottom of their own copies. In small groups, they will discuss the poet's message, and which words she uses to convey the message. As a large group, they will be asked, **How does Oliver convey a sense of place? Is it a literal or figurative place? How do you know?** We will talk about the notion that a place can actual be within one's mind, without physically going to it.
3. (25 Minutes) I will hand out a copy of W.B. Yeats' poem, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and have them listen while I play a recording of Yeats reading the poem. Students will analyze the imagery in the poem, and how Yeats uses it to convey a message. **What is his message? How is it similar to Oliver's? How is it different than Oliver's?** They will then free-write for ten minutes in response to the following: **what is your Innisfree? Why? Is it different than "home"? Why or why not?** *Students will see that Innisfree is similar to Oliver's Walden because they are both mindsets that the poets hope to return to.*

Homework: find a song that depicts the concept of sense of place. Highlight the lyrics that specifically connect to the theme of sense of place, and write in the margins your ideas on how it connects.

Assessment:

- Class participation
- Notes on poem and song are graded for effort
- Homework will be collected

Places, People and Poetry: Thoreau and Literature
Lesson #4: Sense of Place in Music

(55-minute Class)

Abstract (2-5 sentences):

This lesson comes right after lesson #3, in which students analyzed poetry in connection to a sense of place. Their homework for today was to find a song whose lyrics reflect a sense of place. They will analyze the lyrics of Joni Mitchell's song, "Woodstock" in an effort to connect the concept of place and mindset to the nature of relationships as defining a place.

Goals/Objectives:

- Students will understand the use of imagery in poetry to convey a theme.
- Students will be able to make parallels between various poems and songs.
- Students will be able to identify themes from the unit in popular culture.

Procedure/lesson plan:

1. (5 Minutes) Do Now: students should respond to the following quotation from Thoreau: "Only that travelling is good which reveals to me the value of home and enables me to enjoy it better" (Journal, volume VIII). **Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Have you ever gone on a trip that made you value home more? Explain. How does it connect to our discussion from yesterday?**
2. (20 Minutes) I will hand out a copy of the lyrics of Joni Mitchell's song, "Woodstock" and have them listen while I play a recording of it. I will give them a brief history of the event of Woodstock, and then they will discuss the images that stand out to them in pairs, using the following questions: **How is this song similar to Yeats' poem? How is it different? How is sense of place being conveyed here? Why did Mitchell write this song? What is "home" for her?** *As a large group, we will discuss how Woodstock offered a sense of place to those who were in need of one. They might consider the important of where it took place, but, as the song suggests, it is more about the people and music present than the physical space.*
3. (10 Minutes) Students will share their homework (song lyrics that convey a sense of place) with a small group, explaining how the lyrics support a sense of place. Each group will pick one song for me to play to the group before opening up a larger discussion about how sense of place extends to home. **How does travelling connect to sense of place? Is it important to experience other places? Why or why not?**
4. (20 Minutes) How deliberate are we at home? I will ask students to write down everything they did at home from the second they arrived their yesterday to the second they left for school this morning. *My guess is that most students will not remember details.* **Why do we have more of a tendency to "go through the**

motions” at home than when we travel? *This will lead to a discussion about routine, and I will tell them how Thoreau stated (by posting on the board):* “I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is Eve or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear, that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the Highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity!” After students have broken down the meaning of the passage, I will ask them, **Should we leave places to live other lives? Is there anything positive about routine? What does it take away from us? What routine do you have that you complete without thinking?**

Assessment:

- class participation
- homework is graded
- deliberation exercise is graded for completion

Places, People and Poetry: Thoreau and Literature
Lesson #5: Sense of Place in Media

(55-minute Class)

Abstract (2-5 sentences):

This lesson comes toward the end of the unit because it considers how humans create a sense of place through news outlets and social media. Their homework for today was to go on Facebook for 30 minutes (determined that they all have Facebook accounts in advance) and make a list of observations, similar to the observations they made in lesson #1. These observations are both external (what do I notice about the postings in my newsfeed?) and internal (how do I feel as I peruse other people's walls?) In class, they will examine newspapers in response to a Thoreau passage in an effort to determine the role of the human in a place.

Goals/Objectives:

- Students will participate in small and large group discussion.
- Students will understand the significance of Thoreau's ideas in the context of their daily lives.
- Students will be able to identify themes from the unit in popular culture.

Procedure/lesson plan:

1. (5-10 Minutes) Do Now: Students will respond to the following passage from *Walden*: "*And I am sure that I never read any memorable news in a newspaper. If we read of one man robbed, or murdered, or killed by accident, or one house burned, or one vessel wrecked, or one steamboat blown up, or one cow run over on the Western Railroad, or one mad dog killed, or one lot of grasshoppers in the winter — we never need read of another. One is enough. If you are acquainted with the principle, what do you care for a myriad instances and applications? To a philosopher all news, as it is called, is gossip, and they who edit and read it are old women over their tea*" (Where I lived and what I lived for). **Paraphrase Thoreau's ideas here. Do you agree or disagree with him? Explain your response, using examples from your homework assignment. Why do people read the newspaper or watch the news? What do they gain from it? What do they lose?**
2. (30 Minutes) I will hand students each a copy of the front section of the newspaper and a handout with the assignment (see attached). They will examine the newspaper and then write a journal in response to a series of questions. *Teachers could also have students complete this at home, or simply discuss it, but in this program, students do most writing in class, and need time to create their own thoughts prior to discussion in a larger group.*

3. (15-20 Minutes) Large group discussion based on their journals. I will ask students, **how does Facebook add to a “sense of place”?** **How does the news add to or create a sense of place?** **Have humans been a part of your sense of place? Why or why not?** To end the class, students must answer the following on an index card: **Why do we spend time reading about others’ lives on Facebook and other forms of social media, rather than living our own? What might Thoreau say about this?**

Assessment:

- class participation
- journal entry
- summarizer index card

(75-minute Class)

Abstract (2-5 sentences):

This lesson is the last one in the unit, after the students attend a field trip to Walden Pond. The class period will be devoted to them working on creative graphic maps (since almost all work is done in class in this program). Homework due today was to find a Thoreau passage that they were interested in, and that spoke to their ideas about sense of place.

Goals/Objectives:

- Students will be able to create a symbol of their concept of “sense of place.”
- Students will be able to choose their own passage from Thoreau and represent its ideas visually.

Procedure/lesson plan:

1. (5 Minutes) Do Now: Everyone will take out the passage from Thoreau that they had to choose for homework. Answer the following questions: **why did you choose this passage? What is Thoreau’s message in this passage?**
2. (70 Minutes) Graphic maps: students will receive the attached assignment, which asks them to create a visual representation of a concept. They can use colors, shapes, and other images (all hand-drawn) but no words other than the passage they chose for homework. They will work on these in class, and then present them to each other for the last ten minutes. *I will show models of other graphic maps to students prior to starting because I find they have a hard time understanding what the final product “should” look like.*

Assessment:

- class participation
- homework assignment
- graphic map and explanation of choices

Bibliography

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. (2011). Retrieved from

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html>

Thoreau, Henry David. (2011). *The Quotable Thoreau*. Jeffrey S. Cramer (Ed.).

Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.

Thoreau, Henry David (2006). *Walden*. Jeffrey S. Cramer (Ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale

University.

Links English
Homework due:

Living Deliberately to Develop a Sense of Place

Your homework this week has two parts to it. Be sure to put your full effort and thought into both.

1. Use your notes from Tuesday's observational exercise to write a paragraph (8-10 sentences) in which you create an image for your reader of the place in which you observed your surroundings. Use the notes from all of your senses to create sentences that show the reader where you were. The more details you have, the better! You can type or handwrite your response; attach the notes to the back prior to handing in.
2. Think of a route you take on a regular basis: perhaps your walk to school, work, a friend's house, or frozen yogurt establishment (if you go as frequently as I do). Before Friday, you must alter your route to the same destination (considerably, you cannot simply walk on the other side of the street). Pay attention to your surroundings in this new route: do you notice a house, a sign, a tree that you have never seen before? Do you hear different sounds if the street is busier or less busy than your usual route? Pay attention to how you feel as you walk: less comfortable? More focused? Just as zoned out as on the usual route? When you arrive at your destination, write your responses to these questions in a full paragraph (8-10 sentences). Make meaning of your experience. Were you forced to act more deliberately (refer to your class notes for the definition)? Did you enjoy it more? Less? Why?

Where I'm From
By George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger,
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments--
snapped before I budded --
leaf-fall from the family tree.

I AM FROM POEM
Due: Thursday, September 6

Write your own “Where I’m From” poem using George Ella Lyon’s poem as inspiration. Consider the following format:

Stanza 1 – items found around your home: safety pins, stacks of magazines, discount coupons, piles of dirty dishes.

Stanza 2 – Items found in your yard: a broken swing set, a garden hose, dog bones, a snow shovel. Think of comparisons you can make.

Stanza 3 – Items found in your neighborhood: the corner store, the neighbors’ beat up Chevy, the park bench.

Stanza 4 – Names of relatives, especially ones that link you to the past.

Stanza 5 – Sayings: “If you’re bored, pick weeds...” (From what you have heard around the house or your relatives’ homes)

Stanza 6 – Names of foods and dishes that recall family gatherings: Grandmother’s pumpkin pie, black eyed peas and collard greens, jello and whipped cream “salad”.

Stanza 7 – Names of places you keep your childhood memories: an old shoebox, a journal, a special drawer.

Try to find a hook to link the poem forward through some kind of device like a repeating line, so the poem can develop momentum. You can use the line “I am from...” or create another phrase.

Develop many possible names or objects so that you can experiment with meter and rhyme. How long will each line be? What words will you choose and why? Try to come up with original patterns to reflect your own experiences.

Have fun!!! You will be amazed at how your poetry sounds once it is read out loud.

Where I'm From
by Ms. Barker

I'm from stacks of magazines,
overflowing bookcases,
and lost Barbie heels.

I'm from potato bugs rolled up like smooth marbles,
muddy backyard forts,
and swarming citrus trees.

I'm from shady trails in Presidio Park,
door-bell ditching and tree climbing,
and neighborhood feuds with the mean girls up the street.

I'm from ghost stories told on playgrounds,
ouija board séances,
swimming meets and rides to gymnastics.

I'm from nobody's perfect,
if you're bored pick weeds
and you can do anything.

I'm from Grandmother's spicy pumpkin pie,
mom's steaming chicken soup,
and Dad's black-eyed peas and collared greens.

I'm from dreams and moments written down in journals
And family heirlooms shoved in jewelry boxes.

Going to Walden by Mary Oliver

It isn't very far as highways lie.
I might be back by nightfall, having seen
The rough pines, and the stones, and the clear water.
Friends argue that I might be wiser for it. They do not hear that far-off Yankee whisper:
How dull we grow from hurrying here and there!
Many have gone, and think me half a fool
To miss a day away in the cool country.
Maybe. But in a book I read and cherish,
Going to Walden is not so easy a thing
As a green visit. It is the slow and difficult
Trick of living, and finding it where you are.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

W.B. Yeats

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes
dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket
sings,
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Thoreau and the Newspaper

Directions: Please read the following quote from *Walden* and respond to it by completing both the pre-writing and journal activities listed below.

“And I am sure that I never read any memorable news in a newspaper. If we read of one man robbed, or murdered, or killed by accident, or one house burned, or one vessel wrecked, or one steamboat blown up, or one cow run over on the Western Railroad, or one mad dog killed, or one lot of grasshoppers in the winter — we never need read of another. One is enough. If you are acquainted with the principle, what do you care for a myriad instances and applications? To a philosopher all news, as it is called, is gossip, and they who edit and read it are old women over their tea”

Walden, “Where I lived and what I lived for”

1. **Preparation to write** – Read through the entire first section of the newspaper, skimming 75% of it, and actively reading 25% of the articles (based on which headlines interest you – note, you must read articles outside of the sports section). Identify the writers’ purposes in producing these articles. Notice if there are multiple articles about the same action or idea. Identify stories that catch and keep your interest. Identify stories that bore you, upset you, excite you, surprise you.
2. **Journal** – write a journal entry which includes a brief description of the newspaper and articles you chose but devotes the bulk of the discussion to the questions: why do people read the newspaper? What do they gain from reading the newspaper? What do they lose? Do you agree that there is never “any memorable news in a newspaper”? Discuss. Do you agree with the idea of not needing to read about deaths or disasters if we have already read about them before? “If you are acquainted with the principle, what do you care for a myriad instances and applications?” Is it better to be ignorant or informed? Should we care what happens to others in the same city, state, country, world? Is there any way you would improve the newspaper you read? How? **How does the news give a “sense of place”?**

Getting Graphic with Thoreau

Your final assessment for this Sense of Place and Transcendentalism Unit is to create a visual representation (ie: a picture) of the ideas that we have studied for the last two weeks. Your project must adhere to the following:

- One 8" by 10" sheet of paper is completely covered with the image(s) that you think best represent sense of place and the Thoreau quotation you chose for homework.

***Be creative! Do not draw Walden Pond or a man planting beans. Think of an image that symbolizes the idea you are trying to convey.**

- You may use shapes, colors, lines, and other images to represent your ideas, but you may not use words...
- ...other than the Thoreau passage that you have written neatly on the front of the graphic map somewhere.
- ...and a creative title for your map.
- On the back of the graphic map, neatly write 3-5 sentences explaining your artistic choices, and how they connect to the ideas we have discussed in class.
- You will present your map to the class (hooray!).

Maps will be graded on effort, adherence to the assignment, thoughtfulness in your artistic choices, and connection to the major ideas presented in class.