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*English I Honors Curriculum Unit – Approaching Walden Lesson Plans for PDP’s
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Living Deliberately- The Legacy of Henry David Thoreau- Education and Experience

Essential Questions: What are the rewards of having a sense of place and living simply?
How do we determine what and what is not valuable in life?
What are the benefits of self-reliance?
Who determines the best way to live?
What does it mean to live life deliberately and authentically, and how do we know that we are?

Abstract: Henry David Thoreau was a highly educated intellectual whose two year, two month, two day tenancy in the woods at Walden Pond was an experiment in how to live. His detailed account of his stay in the woods left us with a remarkable understanding of the intellectual and physical world that he inhabited. This unit will also be an experiment. It will take place twice a term throughout the year, in an effort to observe the natural world each season (though it could also be compressed into a semester). The unit will attempt to develop in students the ability to draw some conclusions about the importance of HDT as a literary figure in American literature and about themselves and their relationship to their environment. Students will write in their journals informally throughout the year, some of which they will revise. Journal writing will involve observation, drawing, reading and responding to excerpts from Thoreau’s *Walden*, *The People of Concord*, Emerson’s “Self-Reliance,” and literary excerpts on the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers, self-reflection and evaluation, journaling, and assessment of environmental factors observed. The unit will focus around four excerpts from *Walden* that will form the basis of our inquiry, but student responses may take the inquiry into other directions. Students will be required to complete string journals one to two times a week each quarter. Finally, students will be asked to consider the journey of Odysseus in Homer’s *Odyssey* in light of their study of Thoreau’s *Walden*.

Objectives: To develop mindfulness and to strengthen powers of observation
To encourage deep thinking
To demonstrate powers of observation and deep thinking through journal writing and revising (organization, level of detail, use of imagery, style, tone, diction, content)
To develop understanding of nonfiction and its purpose
To discover what exists in their back yards and the routes they frequent
To develop a sense of place
To introduce students to Henry David Thoreau
To create a stronger connection between the individual and his/her environment
To formulate open-ended questions
To research and draw logical and valid conclusions

ELA Curriculum Framework Standards

Language

Questioning, Listening, and Contributing

Standard #2 Students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute their own information in group discussions or interviews in order to acquire new knowledge.

2.5 Summarize in a coherent and organized way information and ideas learned from a focused discussion.

Reading and Literature

Standard #13 Students will identify, analyze and apply knowledge of the purpose, structure, and elements of nonfiction or informational materials and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.

13.24 Analyze the logic and use of evidence in an author's argument

13.25 Analyze and explain the structure and elements of nonfiction works.

Standard #15 Students will identify and analyze how an author's words appeal to the senses, create imagery, suggest mood, and set tone and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.

15.7 Evaluate how an author's choice of words advances the theme of purpose of a work.

15.8 Identify and describe the importance of sentence variety in the overall effectiveness of an imaginary/literary or informational/expository work.

15.10 Analyze and compare style and language across significant cross-cultural literary works.

Composition

Standard #19 Students will write with a clear focus, coherent organization, and sufficient detail.

19.26 Write well-organized essays that have a clear focus, logical development, effective use of detail, and variety in sentence structure.

Standard #20 Students will write for different audiences and purposes.

20.5 Use different levels of formality, style, and tone when composing for different audiences.

Standard #21 Revising

21.8 Revise writing by attending to topic/idea development, organization, level of detail, language/style, sentence structure, grammar and usage, and mechanics

Standard #24 Students will gather information from a variety of sources, analyze and evaluate the quality of the information they obtain, and use it to answer their own questions.

24.5 Formulate open-ended research questions and apply steps for obtaining and evaluation information from a variety of sources, organizing information, documenting sources in a consistent and standard format, and presenting research.

Lesson #1 Seeing, hearing, and reflecting

Classroom: The woods behind the school and in the classroom. 20 -25 minutes

Activity #1:

What do you see? What do you hear? What do you think? Observations and drawings.
Drawing leaves or plants, without removing pencils. Taking notes on observations, including location, time of day, weather, temperature, and date. Please end each observation session with a question generated from your experience.

Activity #2: In class- 5 minute journal reflection on activity and discussion.

Journal Assignment for Homework or in class: Response to quote from *Walden* "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For"

Walden Journal Assignment #1

“Where I Lived and What I Lived For”

Directions:

Read the following passage from the chapter “Where I Lived and What I Lived For” in Thoreau’s *Walden*. Then complete the pre-writing and journal activities that follow.

“We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour. If we refused, or rather used up, such paltry information as we get, the oracles would distinctly inform us how this might be done.”

Walden, “Where I Lived and What I Lived For”

- 1. Preparation to write (things to think about)** – How often do you do things simply out of routine? How many times have you driven or been driven somewhere and never noticed your surroundings in any way? How often are you focused on listening to your iPod and tuning out everything that is around you? Is this a good thing? An okay thing? A bad thing? How much time do you spend on mindless activities?
- 2. Preparation to write** - Take a notebook or journal and a pencil and walk part of your route to school or a place that you jog or go to frequently. (You may want to go to Farm or Channing Pond if it is a favorite place for you.) Stop when something in nature (a bird, tree, plant, flower, weed, wild animal) catches your attention or if something in nature draws you to it. Spend one minute drawing what you have focused on. Draw in one continuous motion without lifting up your pencil and don’t look at your paper (no cheating!). Do the same exercise again using the same flower, tree, etc, though this time as you draw, you may look at what you are doing. Once again, do not take your pencil up from the paper and only draw for one minute (Check your watch before you begin!). Please bring your two drawings with you along with your journal assignment.
- 3. Journal** – Describe how you see the world around you, and then discuss the questions: What value if any is there in seeing the details in life? What does it mean to be fully awake? What does it mean to live deliberately?

Lesson #2- Discovering a sense of place and your place in it.

Materials: Enough string for classes; pencils; notebooks and drawing paper.

Activity:

String journal: Give students piece of string. Ask them to tie their piece of string somewhere in their yards (a favorite place somewhere that is outside and easily accessible) and describe what they observe in the area that they have placed their strings. No Ipods, cell phones, or electronics allowed! Students should spend twenty to thirty minutes outside, three times a week for a minimum of two weeks, and should return to the same spot for all observations. In the fall, collect three or four fallen leaves; iron between pieces of wax paper. Each journal should conclude with a question. No weather excuses allowed. **At the end of every two weeks, they must choose one entry to revise.**

They must note the following:

Date

Time of day

Location

Weather

What they observe (may be accompanied with drawings)

What they hear

Reflections

Number of minutes spent observing

Question generated from observations

Students must observe the area where they placed their piece of string three times a week for two weeks and write in their journals. They should keep in mind a sense of place.

Students should note changes in the environment, observing the sky, the earth, the trees, the rocks, animals, any part of nature that surrounds them. They should also reflect on themselves as observers, and note any changes in their thinking.

Journal Assignment: From “Higher Laws” in *Walden* (Homework or in class)

Walden Journal Assignment #2

“Higher Laws”

Directions:

Read the following passage from the chapter “Higher Laws” in Thoreau’s *Walden*. Then complete the pre-writing and journal activities that follow.

“Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead. We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any nobleness begins at once to refine a man's features, any meanness or sensuality to imbrute them.”

Walden, “Higher Laws”

1. **Preparation to write (things to think about)** -How often do you think about how you want to live your life? What is your responsibility toward yourself as a human being in terms of how to live your life? What is the right way to live? What kinds of repetitive things do you do in your life (i.e. video games), and why do you think that you do them? What choice do we have in our futures? Are you the architect of your own destiny? How are we all sculptors and painters?
2. **Journal**- What is each human being’s responsibility to himself or herself? Include a description of some of the essential things that you thought about as you prepared to write this journal entry. Feel free to use the Thoreau quotation in your entry.

Lesson #3 The connection between nature and the self and thoughtful reflection and the self. Making sense out of life, respecting the environment, and conserving the environment. What have you observed in your own back yard?

Classroom: Spring Field Trip- Walden Pond

Students will continue their string journals, but we will journey outside of our immediate environment to Walden Pond.

Readings: “Sudbury, Concord, and Assabet Rivers” Type favorite descriptions and bring to class. Be prepared to share.

Field Trip follow-up assignment (Due in one week):

Choose one thing that you discovered on the field trip that surprised, captivated, or interested you. Write a one to two page journal exploring what you discovered. Research is encouraged. Be sure to properly document. Draw conclusions if possible.

Walden Journal Assignment #3

“Reading”

Directions:

Read the following passage from the chapter “Reading” in Thoreau’s *Walden*. Then complete the pre-writing and journal activities that follow.

“My residence was more favorable, not only to thought, but to serious reading, than a university; and though I was beyond the range of the ordinary circulating library, I had more than ever come within the influence of those books which circulate round the world, whose sentences were first written on bark, and are now merely copied from time to time on to linen paper. Says the poet Mîr Camar Uddin Mast, "Being seated, to run through the region of the spiritual world; I have had this advantage in books. To be intoxicated by a single glass of wine; I have experienced this pleasure when I have drunk the liquor of the esoteric doctrines." I kept Homer's *Iliad* on my table through the summer, though I looked at his page only now and then. Incessant labor with my hands, at first, for I had my house to finish and my beans to hoe at the same time, made more study impossible. Yet I sustained myself by the prospect of such reading in future. I read one or two shallow books of travel in the intervals of my work, till that employment made me ashamed of myself, and I asked where it was then that *I* lived.”

Walden, “Reading”

1. **Preparation to write (things to think about)** - What kinds of things do you like to read? What inspires you to read? What is the value of reading? How often do you question why you are asked to read particular texts in school? Do you wish that you could choose what you would like to read, when you would like to read (or not read), and where you would like to read? What makes you want to read? How does place influence your ability to focus on what you read? What makes a piece of literature valuable or worthy of your time?
2. **Journal** – Write a journal entry about what makes a piece of literature valuable and worthy of your time. Include a brief description of some of the things that you thought about in preparing to write.

Lesson #4- What exactly does it mean to live deliberately?

Questions to consider: What has your experiment taught you? How does Odysseus's life long journey compare with Thoreau's experiment in the woods?

Reading: Excerpts from Emerson's "Self-Reliance"

Final Journal Assignment: "Conclusion" from *Walden*

Walden Journal Assignment #4

"Conclusion"

Directions:

Read the following passage from the chapter "Conclusion" in Thoreau's *Walden*. Then complete the pre-writing and journal activities that follow.

"I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."

Walden, "Conclusion"

- 1. Preparation for writing-** Why are dreams important? How often do you think that you cannot live your dreams because your parents or society stand in your way? How often do you make significant decisions that have no basis in what you really want to do but because you feel that you have to? Do you feel that you have choices in your life? Is it hard to follow your dreams? If so, why?
- 2. Journal –** What are the pros and cons of living life in the way you desire to and working toward your dreams?
- 3. Lesson (in-class):** Rhetorical devices in the excerpt (repetition, tone, imagery).

Final Assessments:

- 1. Portfolio of 4 revised journal assignments with drawings and self-evaluation of your environmental journey. Please include your original journal entry for each of your revised entries. (100 points)**
- 2. Two response essays answering/exploring two questions that you posed in your journals. (40 points each)**
- 3. Essay that brings together your personal journey this year with the wisdom of Thoreau (*Walden*), Emerson (“Self-Reliance”), and Homer (*The Odyssey*). (4-5 typed pages, double-spaced, size 12 font, Times New Roman proper heading including your name, the date due, your block, and the title of your paper.) (100 points)**

Rubric for Journals

	5	4	3	2	1	Total
VOICE	Unique, compelling, and consistent voice; figurative language abounds	Consistent and convincing voice; some use of figurative language	Some inconsistencies; occasional strength of voice	A voice with occasional moments of conviction and concern	Voice is perfunctory and dutiful, the sound of someone fulfilling an assignment	
COHERENCE & DETAIL	Each piece develops an idea fully, with vivid detail, impressive unity, and strong lead-in and wrap-up; clear purpose	Strong detail and good sense of unity	Some attention to detail and an attempt to bring unity to the piece	Occasional detail and occasional attempts to build toward a clear purpose	Generalization unsupported and purpose unclear	
SMOOTHNESS OF PROSE	Impressive variety of sentence types, using array of phrases and clauses; smooth transitions and appropriate word choice	Variety of phrases and clauses; care with word choice	Simple language, clear and consistent; prosaic word choice	Choppy sentences; occasional lack of sentence integrity	Tedious and flawed sentences; clichés and inappropriate word choice	
IDEAS	Singular thinking; powerful observations, developed logically; deftly uses quotes from excerpts for support*	Strong ideas; sense of a person interacting with the world around him or her; supports with quotes from excerpts appropriately and with competence*	Occasional new idea or observation; slight development; uses quotes from excerpts somewhat competently*	Banal thinking, slightly developed; rarely supports observations.	Lack of clear ideas	
MECHANICS	Sophisticated use of language and punctuation	Strong and accurate use of language and punctuation	Few errors in language use and punctuation	Consistent errors in use of language and punctuation	Errors overwhelm the piece of writing	
COMPLETION OF REQUIREMENTS	Requirements completely and impressively met	Requirements met well	Most requirements met	Some requirements met	Few or no requirements met	

*Where applicable

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