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“We find only the world we look For”: Documenting a Sense of Place Using iMovie

Abstract:

This high school English unit capitalizes on students' love of their camera phones, requiring them to shoot and edit their own footage of an important place in their lives. Throughout this unit, students will read excerpts of Thoreau's *Walden* and his journals, in and out of class, to discern how Thoreau communicated his perspectives on Concord in general and The Walden Woods in particular. A field trip to Walden will further students' understanding of the world Thoreau inhabited and provide fodder for their own place-specific responses in journal form. Students will also read American poems that speak to other environments and places, comparing and contrasting approaches and poetic techniques. The unit will culminate in a presentation of student films which will have been edited to include music, natural sounds, and text that suits each student's specific sense of place. To ensure that these films “live on” and feel relevant to the students beyond the classroom, students will post them to a shared Tackk page and comment on one another's work publicly.

Time frame: 3-ish weeks, depending on available technology and teacher's comfort level with hardware and software. This unit could also be appended to a longer Transcendentalism unit or even serve as an end-of-year project depending on required texts.

Learning Objectives:

Students will generate questions about Thoreau and his relationship to Walden using the QFT (Question Formulation Technique). See Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana's *Make Just One Change*.

Students will read and analyze excerpts of *Walden* to investigate the place he inhabited and observed during his two years at his house on Walden Pond.

Students will visit Walden themselves to journal, muse, draw, observe and document the environment.

Students will collaboratively design iMovie trailers using available templates to render *Walden* in a particular visual style and voice.

Using a camera phone or iPad, students will shoot a place that is personally relevant using varied camera angles, shot types and durations.

Students will edit their own footage in iMovie to generate a 2-minute film that communicates a clear sense of place.

Students will choose appropriate music (either found or original) to accompany their film and lay in the music "track" using iMovie.

Students will also lay in an audio track of themselves (or someone else) reading a poem or paragraph that helps convey the mood of (or a new dimension to) the place they wish to document.

Students will present finished films to classmates.

Students will upload their finished films to a shared class Tackk page and provide thoughtful, constructive comments on at least three of their classmates' films.

Students will write a reflection on their finished film that communicates how their visual and auditory choices helped communicate an idea about their chosen place.

Major texts:

“Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” “Sounds,” “The Ponds,” “Solitude” from *Walden*;
related short excerpts from Thoreau’s journals inspired by daily discussion

Supporting Texts/readings:

“The Summer Day” by Mary Oliver

“Looking West From Laguna Beach at Night” by Charles Wright

“Spring Evening on Blind Mountain” by Louise Erdrich

“The Cry Going Out Over Pastures” by Robert Bly

“Anyone Lived In a Pretty How Town” by e.e. cummings

“Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota” by James Wright

“Walking at Night” by Louise Gluck

“The Most of It” by Robert Frost

Technology/materials needed:

iPads and/or camera phones

iMovie

Traditional notebook or journal and pen or pencil

Projector to completed student work

Student access to Google drives

Google drive and/or Tackk page to host student work

Unit Plan

Lesson 1: Introduce Thoreau and *Walden*, and describe what the culminating project will entail. Teacher may show model to generate interest. Access students' prior understanding of Thoreau and his work. Generate a list of questions about *Walden*, particularly Thoreau's relationship to the pond and surrounding woods, as a class using the "QFT". **Homework:** Read "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" / begin thinking about a chosen place.

Lesson 2: How do students characterize Thoreau's voice? What's the relationship between that voice and his sense of place? How does Thoreau see, observe, record, and "translate" his environs? **Homework:** Read "Sounds" / finalize choice of locations

Lesson 3: Students have chosen their place by now and have begun filming on their own. Teacher leads discussion of student-chosen passages that convey a clear sense of place in "Sounds" and "Solitude"; **Homework:** Read "The Ponds"

Lesson 4: Field trip to Walden — camera journaling. The teacher should use this excursion to familiarize students with the environment, and also give students opportunities to stop and journal, draw, and use their camera phones to gather footage of Walden that they can use for a mini-iMovie trailer project in class.

Lesson 5: Discussion of sense of place/ journal observations from trip

Lesson 6: (2 class periods) iMovie practice in small groups — create a trailer using iMovie using footage from the trip to Walden conveying a specific tone and sense of the place; use text from the readings as the trailer's voiceover or title cards.

Lesson 7: Show trailers in class, then reflect on everyone's approach. How did each trailer convey a sense of place? What visual choices and types of shots helped convey an attitude about the place depicted? How did music and other

aspects of each trailer help communicate a sense of place? **Homework:** Upload phone footage to Google drives.

Lesson 8: Place poems — students will work in small groups to read and annotate poems that convey a strong sense of place. How do the poets' approaches compare? Are all important places sacred? When is a place a metaphor for something more abstract? When is a place the true subject of the poem as opposed to its context? What kinds of truths do these places encourage us to see? How do these poets' approaches to place differ from Thoreau's in *Walden*? **Homework:** Continue uploading footage to Google drives.

Lesson 9: (1-2 days depending on how well students understand and use the technology) Time in class to continue uploading footage into Google drives for use in iMovie. Students should have access to laptops to do this. Download footage from drive to desktop for use in iMovie. By end of class, everyone has an open "project" in iMovie. **Homework:** Research music and an accompanying text for sense of place film.

Lesson 10: (2-3 days of class time with laptops) Students spend this time editing footage in iMovie and laying in music and sound tracks over the finished film. They may be reading their chosen texts into their phones or laptops, or uploading a recording of someone else's voice from their phones.

Lesson 11: Students peer-review films in small groups using headphones. What can be reshaped or edited? Is the sound audible? Are background noises distracting? Is there a compelling variety of shot types and durations? What is working particularly well? What can be further clarified or emphasized?

Lesson 12: Final day of production: Upload finished films to Tackk page.

Lesson 13: (1-2 days) Presentation of films! Students will present films to classmates and provide meaningful comments to class Tackk page on at least three peers' films.

Final reflections are due 3-5 days after the films are completed to allow students the space to step back from their work and analyze their own choices.

A glossary of film terms

COMPOSITION

Blocking: The arrangement of characters on the set and within the frame

Foreground / Background: Terms used to describe the spaces within the frame that are either distant from the camera or close to it.

Frame / Framing: The border of the image, which demarcates the space of the action. Framing can be loose or tight, open or closed.

Mise-en-scène: A French term from theater that refers to the arrangement of elements (characters, props, structures, space) within the frame of the image. (Basically a fancy term for composition.)

Negative space: Empty space that has significance because of its relationship to the other objects in the frame, especially characters.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Shot: One constant recording of events by a camera.

Types of shot

Aerial shot: An extreme high-angle shot from a helicopter, airplane, or crane.

Arc shot: A continuous take that moves the camera in a circle around a character or an action.

Close-up shot: When the camera is close to the object so that the object takes up most of the space within the frame. Related to Extreme close-up, when the camera is placed at an unusually close distance to the object filmed.

Establishing shot: Usually at the start of a sequence, it usually consists of a wide or full shot that tells the audience where the action about to be viewed occurs.

Eye-level shot: A shot taken at eye level.

Handheld shot: Filming done with a camera not mounted on a tripod.

High-angle shot: When the camera looks down at the object filmed.

Low-angle shot: When the camera looks up at the object filmed.

Medium shot: A shot of characters from a medium distance.

Long or wide shot: A shot that includes more of the environment.

Pan shot: A shot in which the camera rotates on its pivot but does not itself move in relation to the object. There is also the Swish pan, a pan in which the camera swivels so fast that it blurs the action.

POV shot: A shot from the perspective of one of the characters.

Reaction shot: A shot that cuts away from the action to show a character's reaction to the action.

Tilt shot: Angling the camera up or down on the action.

Tracking shot: When the camera moves, often on tracks or a truck, to follow the movement of an object.

Other terms from cinematography

Deep focus: Deep focus lenses allow for greater depth of field, so that the background and the foreground can be simultaneously in focus.

Rack focus: A sudden change of focal point from one visual plane to another, as when an object or character in the foreground ceases to be in focus while an object in the background comes into focus.

Zoom: Zooms move from a distance continuously to be close to an object, or move from close to an object to be far from it (zoom in, zoom out).

EDITING

Cut: The transition from one shot to the next. Includes Crosscutting and Inter-cutting. In crosscutting, two simultaneous and related actions are depicted, and the film cuts back and forth between them — as when in a chase, one character pursues and another is pursued. Inter-cutting is the insertion of a piece of film from another action in the middle of a sequence.

Cutaway: A shot that breaks an ongoing flow of matching shots by depicting a relevant detail that is connected to the ongoing action.

Dissolve: The blending of one image into the next at a cut.

Eyeline match: When the cutting joins shots in which the eyelines of the characters are at the same distance from the top of the frame from one shot to the next.

Fade (in or out): When a shot or sequence begins or ends by slowly dissolving the image or by slowly bringing it into view.

Jump-cut: An abrupt transition through cutting that disturbs continuity.

Montage: A dynamic editing style that combines many shots, often rapidly, to make a point (about, e.g., the passage of time or the development of a character).

Reverse angle shot: A shot that reverses the perspective of a preceding shot. Often used in dialog and called **Shot reverse shot**.

ART DIRECTION

CGI: Computer generated imagery.

Diegetic sound: Sound that emerges from the action on the screen. **Nondiegetic sound** does not emerge from the action on the screen. Often this consists of an orchestral score and is called **Background music**.

Exposure: The amount of light permitted to strike the film stock, creating either dense, dark images (underexposed) or crisp, bright images (overexposed).

High-key lighting: When light fully illuminates the set, bringing the objects filmed to a brilliant and sharp clarity of outline. Related to Low-key lighting, which under-lights a set to create shadows and less clarity of vision.

SIMPLE Sense of Place film rubric

	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing-	Beginning
Technical Requirements	Film features unique, original footage. Chosen place is thoroughly and captivately documented using a variety of film techniques. Audio is clear and well synced with visual content.	Film features original film footage. Chosen place is documented using several film techniques. Audio is clear and aligns with visual content.	Film features mostly original film footage. Chosen place is documented using some film techniques. Audio is clear and somewhat connected to visual content.	Film features some original footage. Chosen place is documented using minimal film techniques. Audio is not connected to visual content.
Text, tone, and sense of place	Text and chosen place are presented meaningfully with accompanying music that conveys a clear, distinct tone or attitude.	Text and chosen place are presented clearly with accompanying music that conveys a tone or attitude.	Text and chosen place are presented with accompanying music that does not support the text and place.	Text, place, and music are presented in a disorganized or confusing fashion.

Sense of Place Film Reflection Assignment

American Literature

Requirements and rubric:

- *1-2 pages in length, normal font & margins, no extra spaces between paragraphs
- *Keep introduction and conclusion short and to the point.
- *You must quote the text you chose to depict in your film and examine its language.
- *You must discuss specific film choices (angles, cuts, types of shots, etc.) and relate how you think they articulate a sense of place.
- *Close with a thoughtful last insight as opposed to reiterating a previous sentence.

Criteria/Grade	Exemplary	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement
Analysis/Synthesis	Analyzes text with sophistication and originality, taking risks with ideas. Concludes memorably with new insight based on careful attention to text.	Analyzes text, taking limited risks with ideas. Concluding insight provides adequate closure.	Reiterates content with some analysis. Ideas presented are generally logical. Concluding insight may not connect clearly to reflection.	Reiterates content with minimal analysis. Conclusion does not bring adequate closure to reflection.
Discussion of film choices and overall tone and theme	Student's ideas are clearly and thoroughly explained and well supported with quoted evidence and specific details from film.	Student's ideas are generally well explained and supported with specific details and text from film.	Student's ideas are loosely explained and adequately supported with references to the text and film.	Student's ideas are not explained in significant depth, nor are details from the film brought into discussion.
Language and Conventions	Uses highly specific vocabulary and sophisticated sentence structure. Ideas flow smoothly. Quotations are woven seamlessly into prose. Work is error-free.	Uses appropriate vocabulary, correct sentence structure, and some sentence variety. Writing is coherent. Text references generally cited correctly. Few mechanical errors.	Uses mostly appropriate vocabulary. Sentences may lack variety. Mechanical errors may interrupt flow of writing.	Uses incorrect or inappropriate vocabulary. Sentences lack variety. Mechanical errors interfere significantly with meaning.

Standards addressed

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9

Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough 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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B

Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5

Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

Works Cited

Rothstein, Dan and Luz Santana. *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. Print.

Thoreau, H.D. *The Portable Thoreau*. Ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer. New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2012. Print.

Online resources

How to create an iMovie trailer using templates:

https://support.apple.com/kb/PH1471?locale=en_US&viewlocale=en_US

Tackk.com: an online bulletin board, of sorts, where students can post their films

