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**Grades 9-12**

**Special Education: Social, Emotional and Behavioral Program**

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**Live Simply: Finding Thoreau in the American Teenagers World**

In today’s world many of our students (and sometimes the adults who teach them) go through their day-to-day activities without taking much time to think, reflect, or observe the world around them. Rather, they rush from activity to activity, are plugged into electronics all day, and often lose sight of not only their role in the world, but also the world itself. The aim of this unit is to use Thoreau’s words and writings, to help peel back the barriers that stand between my students and the wonders of the world around them.

Working in a program that supports students with social, emotional, behavioral and/or learning challenges I have a great opportunity to look for pathways to introduce my students to new ideas and concepts. As an educator, I always work to show my students different ways to think, but strive to never tell them what to think. In this vain, I aim to utilize our weekly group lessons to introduce them to different ideas that relate to Thoreau’s writings and beliefs as well as today’s world in order to make it relevant to their own lives. Additionally, the unit will also work to help them gain a ‘Sense of Place’ in their own community. Among the concepts we will focus on include perspective taking, living simply, observing nature and following their own path.

**Duration and Objectives:**

* The unit will last approximately 4 weeks initially, with one lesson per week. There will be additional lessons utilizing ‘String Journals’ throughout the year to help develop a ‘Sense of Place’
* Objectives for the unit include:
  + Use Thoreau’s writings and quotes to connect his world to ours today and show the relevance of his words in our modern society
  + Help each student use a perspective taking activity of nature to connect it to their own lives, their community and recognize how one can transfer this skill to daily living and social relationships
  + For students to evaluate the daily choices they make, in terms of how they spend their time, and to consider whether or not they will look back and value how they spent their time when they are older
  + Use ‘String Journals’ to develop their observation, writing, and mindfulness skills, as well as give them a ‘Sense of Place’
  + To help each of my students understand that no path is the same for anyone and if their path looks different than their peers that it is just fine, as long as they are content with it and they listen to their own “drummer”

**Unit Outline:**

This unit is designed for my classes which are part of a program that supports students with social, emotional, behavioral, and/or learning challenges. The students attend class four days per week and of the four days, two are dedicated entirely to supporting them with their content-area class work. During one class per week we work on study skills and during the fourth class we have a group lesson during their triple block. The triple block is longer than other classes and runs 78 minutes and this is when the lessons from this unit will be implemented.  Our group lessons typically last from 25-45 minutes and are then followed by academic support time for their content-area classes.   
  
At the start of the unit we will spend time determining the students understanding of Thoreau, his life, work and legacy. In addition we will give a general overview of these things as a springboard to the unit. The first lesson, 'An Insects View', will focus on perspective taking, both in nature and their social relationships. The second lesson, 'Time To Wake Up And Smell The Jelly Beans', examines how students utilize the time they have each day and asks them to evaluate the ways in which they occupy their days. The lesson utilizes a quote from Thoreau as well as a video to facilitate an exercise which helps students look deeply at the activities they do on an average day and then determine whether they feel this is a positive use of their time.  The third lesson is based on Janet Byrne's 'String Journals' activity and aims to help students gain a 'Sense of Place' in their home community through close observation over time and writing. This lesson will be ongoing and will finish later in the school year with a culminating writing assignment. The last lesson, 'Listen To Your Drummer', is based on Thoreau's 'different drummer' passage. The focus is on helping students understand that they do not have to follow the crowd to find their path and that happiness may look different for each of us.    
  
This unit will initially last four weeks, with one lesson per week, and will be a supplemental unit to the Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum that I teach within the program.  It will then be on-going in the form of the string journal and I aim to add additional lessons later in the year on 'Resisting Injustice', 'Being Deliberate', and 'Embracing technology, but not letting it rule our lives'.

**Grading System:**

**Lessons:** Each of the lessons within this curriculum unit will be factored into my students’ course participation grade. Each lesson will be valued from 0-3 points based on their level of involvement and engagement:

3=Fully invested, participates actively, offers frequent insights, and completes all activities as expected

2=Participates actively, offers some insights, completes most activities

1=Passively participates, rarely shares insights, and completes minimal activities

0=Resistant to participating, does not share insights, and does not complete activities

**Homework:** Each of the homework assignments within this curriculum unit will be factored into my students’ course homework grade. Each lesson will be valued from 0-3 points based on their level of effort and the quality of their work:

3=Completes all assignments as expected and with great effort

2=Completes assignment, but not to the best of their ability

1=Turns in something, but shows little effort or engagement

0=Does not complete homework

**Culminating Project:** Rubrics and assignment expectations to be discussed during the 3rd Quarter of the school year

**Lessons**

1. **Lesson 1: ‘An Insect’s View’**

**Topic/Main Idea:** Perspective taking in nature and beyond

Objectives:

1. Students will use a Thoreau quote to take a deeper look at perspective taking, both in nature and in their personal lives
2. Students will look to make connections between different perspectives in nature and in their personal lives
3. Students will analyze how looking at situations and scenarios from different perspectives can help them understand various points-of-view amongst their peers, friends, family, teachers, neighbors and the greater global community

**Materials:**

1. Thoreau quote on small slips of paper: “Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plane.” H. D. Thoreau (See Appendix 1)
2. Handouts with the following questions to discuss: (See appendix 2)
   * 1. What struck you when you did this exercise?
     2. What did you notice that you couldn’t have predicted?
     3. What parallel can you draw from this exercise to your daily life?
     4. How might we use this idea related to nature to understand our own world and our relationship to it?
     5. How might it connect to our personal relationships?
     6. What can you take away from this exercise as you move forward in your everyday life?
     7. What challenges might you face in trying to do so?

**Activity/Procedure:**

1. Bring the entire class outside to the far side of Clay Pit Pond
2. Instruct every student to go and find a quiet spot and to lie on the ground. Once on the ground tell them to lay their heads parallel to the ground and observe what they see for a few minutes.
3. Bring the group back together and discuss what it is they saw and felt (did they feel ridiculous, uncomfortable, happy, at peace, etc.)
4. Handout slips of paper with Thoreau quote on it and read out loud and discuss its meaning (we would have had a previous discussion prior to this lesson about their experiences with and knowledge of Thoreau and done a very general overview of his writings, the time period and his legacy)
5. Have the students go back to their quiet space and repeat the practice and then come back together after 6-8 minutes
6. Come back together and lead a discussion on their experiences this time and whether anything was different for them.

**Assessment/Wrap-up:**

1. Give each student the handout with the questionnaire
2. Ask them to take 10 minutes to answer the questions and then come together for a facilitated discussion
3. Guide the class through the questions and allow for open dialogue and pursue the paths as they unfold (different classes will focus on different aspects naturally, but guide them toward the notion that not only can we all benefit from trying to see and understand different perspectives in our physical world, but also our personal world)

**Homework:**

1. Go somewhere in the community and find a place where you can see a different perspective to look at the world than you would normally have:
   1. What made you choose this spot?
   2. What perspective are you taking? How is it different than what you would normally see?
   3. What do you notice differently from this perspective?
   4. Are there benefits from doing so?
2. **Lesson 2: “Time To Wake Up And Smell The Jelly Beans!”**

**Topic/Main Idea:** Live Simply, Be Deliberate

**Objectives:**

1. Students will examine their own lives to assess how they use their time and whether it is used wisely
2. Students will compare a Thoreau quote to a video that equates the time in their lives to jelly beans
3. Students will look to make connections to modern society and how so many of us often spend significant amounts of time on things of little importance in the grand scheme of life
4. Students will identify a way in which they can utilize their time in a more meaningful way

**Materials:**

1. Student Handout: “24 Hours In A Day: Where Does It Go?” (See appendix 3)
2. SmartBoard with internet access
   1. Cued up to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOksW_NabEk>
3. Thoreau quotes handout (See appendix 4)
4. Class assessment handout (See appendix 5)

**Activity/Procedure:**

1. Discuss the idea that Thoreau wanted to go to bed each night happy and content with the way he lived his life
2. Ask students to think about how they spend their time each day
3. Have them map out a typical day
   1. Handout
      1. Sleep, TV, grooming, social media, video games, reading, homework, sports, extra-curricular, family, friends, eating, work, volunteering, etc.
4. Review how they spend their time and where they spend the most amount of time and chart categories on the board
5. Watch “The Time You Have” (In JellyBeans) on YouTube
   1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOksW_NabEk>
6. Discuss the idea that Thoreau believed that time was precious and that we are born with only so many hours in our life and how we choose to use them is important and they should mean something.
7. Handout with 2 Thoreau quotes and an analysis area beneath each quote (See appendix 4):
   1. “I do believe in simplicity. It is astonishing as well as sad, how many trivial affairs even the wisest thinks he must attend to in a day……So simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real. Probe the earth to see where your main roots run.”
   2. “Our life is frittered away by detail….Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand…..”
8. Read aloud and then give class 5 minutes to analyze each quote
9. Discuss class analysis as a group
10. Assessment (see below)
    1. Give handout and ask each student to take 5-7 minutes to reflect on the questions and to take bullet notes to discuss with the class

**Assessment/Wrap-up:**

1. Class handout with the following questions (See appendix 5):
   1. When you look back will you value how you spent your time?
   2. What things do you do now that you might anticipate when looking back later in life you may feel were not well spent?
   3. What do you do know that you can anticipate you will look back and feel proud of?
   4. What types of things do you think you should spend more time on? Why?
   5. How might you begin to change this pattern?
   6. How can you use your ‘jelly beans’ better?

**Homework:**

1. Have students write a journal entry about how they think they could use their ‘jelly beans’ better.
2. **Lesson 3: String Journals**

**Topic/Main Idea**: Observation, writing and mindfulness skills as well as developing a ‘Sense of Place’

**Objectives:**

1. Students will revisit the same place repeatedly throughout the year to develop a ‘Sense of Place’ in their community
2. Students will develop their observation skills, as well as their appreciation of their home community, while repeatedly visiting the same place throughout the course of the school year
3. Students will be required to be outside for these exercises and the goal is to help them connect with nature in a way that they may not currently in their daily lives
4. Students will develop their writing skills through close observation and re-frequenting of the same place, noting subtle and less subtle changes over time

**Materials:**

1. Pieces of multi-colored string, about 12” in length
2. Journals
3. Writing utensils
4. Seasonal clothing (ongoing)

**Activity/Procedure** (adapted from Janet Byrne’s ‘String Journals’ activity as presented at ‘Approaching Walden’)**:**

1. Discuss the idea that often times we are so busy in our ‘daily’ lives that we often overlook the natural beauty all around us
2. In order to change this, we will work together to become close observers of nature this school year
3. Give each student a piece of 12” colored string and tell them they will be expected to take this string outside to a place that they can visit easily and often on the school campus (campus has a beautiful pond, trees, perennial flowers, and walking trails)
4. Once they’ve identified a spot they will bring their string their and secure it in place which they will be returning to throughout the year.
5. The 1st Monday of every month they will go to their string for 15 minutes during our class time (must be dressed appropriately; this will be weighed into the grading if they show up unprepared)
6. Once at your string, students should observe the natural surroundings and take notes (or mental ones) about the experience and what it is they see, feel, hear, smell, do not see, do not hear, etc.
7. From month to month they should pay attention to the differences they observe and these should be included in their writings

**Assessment:**

1. Entries that surpass expectations earn an “A” (shows great insights, is creative, shows style; quality, not quantity)
2. Thoughtful entries that meet the criteria earn a “B”
3. An entry that does not meet all of the criteria, but covers some of them and makes an honest effort will receive a “C”
4. Entries that barely cover the criteria, have grammar issues, and seem rushed or not done seriously will receive a “D”
5. Entries that do not meet expectations, are not done seriously and appear to take the assignment lightly will receive an “F”

**Culminating Project:**

1. After the 3rd quarter, students will choose one of their journal entries to revise, build on, and turn in for a graded piece of writing at the end of the school year for a culminating project
   1. Details, criteria and rubric to be provided during the 3rd quarter

**IV. Lesson 4: “Listen to Your Drummer”**

**Topic/Main Idea:** Recognizing that we all do not need to follow the same path to find happiness

**Objectives:**

1. Students will discuss and explore the importance of following their own path and dreams
2. Students will acknowledge that happiness can look different for each of us
3. Students will analyze a Thoreau quote for relevance to today’s world and their life
4. Students will identify a way in which they can begin following their own path immediately

**Materials:**

1. SmartBoard with the following video cued up: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iy37Jl45bJg>

**Activity/Procedure:**

1. Write ‘What is Success’ on the board?
   1. Do a class brainstorm session using the guiding questions below and jot down responses on the board
      1. Is it the same for everyone?
      2. Who decides what success looks like?
      3. Who decides what it looks like for you?
      4. Must we all follow the same path?
      5. Can people follow completely different paths and still arrive at the same destination?
      6. What destination is most important? What does it look like for you?
2. Watch the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iy37Jl45bJg>
   1. Ask students to write down 2 things that stand out from the video as they watch
      1. Discuss what the class noticed about the video
      2. Do they agree with it? Why or why not?
3. Show the following quote on the SmartBoard: “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”
   1. Ask the class to take 2-3 minutes to think about the quote and then write a reaction to it; 2-3 sentences minimum
   2. Discuss student’s responses
      1. Address the following concepts during the discussion:
         1. Following along with the crowd
         2. Doing things because that is the way they have always been done
         3. What keeps people from pursuing their own “drummer”

**Assessment:**

1. Students will complete an exit slip for the activity before transitioning to our academic support time.
   1. The exit slip must include:
      1. 3 Things they took away from this group discussion
      2. 2 reasons why most people just go along with the crowd
      3. 1 thing they know they can do differently immediately to help them follow their own “drummer”

**State Curriculum Framework Standards**

1. **Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework - October 1999**
   1. The Social and Emotional Health Strand is designed to promote skills that students need in daily life as they come to learn about their identity and how to manage interactions with other people. Supporting the development of a broad concept of the self enables students to understand the struggle to achieve success and to manage stress appropriately. Students understand how others can help them establish realistic expectations of success for them. The purpose of this Strand is to provide students with the opportunity to develop a positive sense of self and to understand their place in relationships with peers, family, and community members.
   2. Mental Health includes information for personal development of knowledge and skills as well as social awareness as it relates to attitudes and behaviors. Being able to identify feelings and emotions that are common to everyone and explore how people are affected physically and emotionally by these feelings are important aspects of emotional health.
2. **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Social-Emotional Learning Guide**
   * To increase the knowledge, skills, and disposition necessary for students to be responsible and productive members of the school community and society as a whole
   * Through SEL, students can learn to exhibit pro-social behavior and character skills that will serve them well not only in school, but throughout their lives. They can learn to recognize and manage their emotions, establish healthy relationships, set positive goals, meet personal and social needs, make responsible decisions, and solve problems

**Bibliography**

Cramer, Jeffrey S., ed. *The Portable Thoreau*. New York: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Cramer, Jeffrey S., ed. *The Quotable Thoreau*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011. Print.

**Appendix**

Appendix 1

“Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plane.” Henry David Thoreau 

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Appendix 2

**‘An Insect’s View’-Questionnaire**



i. What struck you when you did this exercise?

ii. What did you notice that you couldn’t have predicted?

iii. What parallel can you draw from this exercise to your daily life?

iv. How might we use this idea related to nature to understand our own world and our relationship to it?

v. How might it connect to our personal relationships?

vi. What can you take away from this exercise as you move forward in your everyday life?

vii. What challenges might you face in trying to do so?

Appendix 3

**“Time To Wake Up And Smell The Jelly Beans!”**

**24 Hours In A Day: Where Does It Go?**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

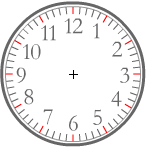
Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Class Section: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_



Directions: Use the template below to chart out how you spend an average day. For each hour you spend on a given thing, shade in ½ hour of the clock and then write the activity in the space taken up for each.

Here are some ideas of how many of us spend our days to get things started: sleep, TV, video games, grooming (hair, nails, make-up, showering/bathing), reading, social media, homework, sports, extra-curricular, family, friends, eating, work, volunteering, watching siblings, etc.



Is there anything that stands out about your clock?

Any surprises?

Do you feel you spend your time wisely?

Are you happy with the way you spend your time?

Do you think, later in your life when you look back that you’ll be happy with how you spent it? If so, please explain. If not, do the same (Respond on the back of this sheet).

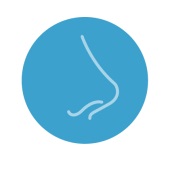
Appendix 4

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Class Section: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**“Time To Wake Up And Smell The Jelly Beans!”**

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**Thoreau Quotes and Analysis**

“I do believe in simplicity. It is astonishing as well as sad, how many trivial affairs even the wisest thinks he must attend to in a day……So simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real. Probe the earth to see where your main roots run” (‘Quotable Thoreau’, Cramer, 289).

Analysis:

“Our life is frittered away by detail….Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand” (‘Quotable Thoreau’, Cramer, 289).

Analysis:

Appendix 5

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Class Section: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**“Time To Wake Up And Smell The Jelly Beans!”**

When you look back on your teenage years, do you believe you will value how you spent your time? Why or why not?

What types of things do you do now that you might anticipate, when looking back later in life, you may feel were not well spent?

What do you do know that you can anticipate you will look back and feel proud of?

What types of things do you think you should spend more time on? Why?

How might you begin to change this pattern?

How can you use your ‘Jelly Beans’ better?