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Honors English 11 American Literature
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Henry David Thoreau, Walden, and Myself in this Place

Overview / Summary

Students will engage in this 'unit' throughout their entire 11th grade academic year. In the beginning of the year, students will learn a basic understanding of Henry David Thoreau and the New England Transcendental period, particularly 1846-1847. Throughout the year, students will not only come away with a rich understanding of Thoreau, Transcendentalism, the Transcendentalists, and the New England Renaissance, but also a deeper understanding of themselves as human beings, as well as their sense of place in a complex world. Journal writing, creative writing, and outdoor experiences will take place throughout the unit.

Duration / Timeframe

The unit will take place throughout the academic year. Each class period is fifty-five minutes long. Below are three (3) lessons that will be presented at the beginning, middle, and end of the academic year.

Lesson One: *Listening to Your own Drummer*

Each student will be given a copy of the handout, *Tracing the "Different Drummer" Passage – compiled by Jeffrey S. Cramer*. Students will form groups of (4) and will be asked to read each quote and choose the quote they most identify with. In small groups, students will discuss teenage identity in society, in their own town, and within their school. They will discuss what identity means to them on a personal level, and their own "place" in society. They will then read the quote they chose and explain how it relates most to them and their notion of self and "place" in society. Students will have (15) minutes to share and discuss within their group. The class will then come together and discuss their findings. (30 minutes) The teacher will then prompt students to discuss the notion of identity and place within South Hadley. They may use questions such as...

- Is it possible to create an identity for South Hadley?
- What is the identity of the people / town / students of South Hadley?
- What is the perceived identity of people from surrounding towns?
- What did you discover within your groups and about yourself?

Note: Quite a few of our students are students who are school choice. Therefore, they come from towns other than South Hadley, MA. There are students who come

from inner city homes, different races, socio-economic status, and experiences. This often differs from those students who make up the majority of South Hadley High School students. The teacher discussion questions will no doubt stimulate a very lively discussion, as this is a topic often discussed within our school. The discussion can also be broadened to a regional, state, country, and global discussion. (How are Western Massachusetts citizens' identity and place perceived? How are Americans' identities and places perceived? Etc.)

For homework, students will then be asked to journal about the discussion that took place within their own groups and with the class as a whole. They will also reflect on their own identity and sense of place. For example, they may answer questions such as: Who am I as a person? How do others perceive me? What is my place in my family, school, town, and the world? Etc. (Yes, these are big questions, however they are questions that students at this age struggle with and attempt to uncover answers. Getting students to think in deeper ways about their present and who they wish to become as human beings is an important inquiry into their lives. Thoreau is an excellent vehicle to help get them there.)

Lesson Two: *Hey Henry, Come on Over to My Place.*

Students will be asked to create a "commercial" that advertises their favorite place and what it means to them as a person. This place must be outside in the natural environment, encourage other students to find their own place, and incorporate Henry David Thoreau and how important his outdoor place was to him. Students may create their "commercial" in any medium they wish. It may be in the form of video, or a very detailed poster visual. Students must include some background information about Henry David Thoreau and Walden Pond / Woods. They must also explain why Thoreau's "place" was so very important to him. Videos must be at least 3 to 5 minutes in length. Posters must demonstrate understanding and show considerable effort. Students would have one week to work on their projects and would be required to present them in class.

Lesson Three: *My Year With Henry David Thoreau.*

After covering an academic year's worth of material and learning about Henry David Thoreau, students will engage in a class forum sharing the different aspects as to what they have learned and come away with because of the class and the content they have studied. (In the past, I have used this question as a final exam essay question and it has yielded some amazing written responses from the students.) The student will share and demonstrate their depth of understanding of Thoreau, Transcendentalism, and several of the pieces of literature studied over the course of the year. They will verbally explain what they have learned about the literary content, Thoreau, Transcendentalism, pieces of literature they felt most connected to, what they have learned about themselves, their own identity, and sense of place. A prewritten dialogue between themselves and Henry David Thoreau will be submitted prior to their presentation. The script will be a conversation, as such,

between the student and Henry whereby they explain to him what they have “learned” throughout the year. The script will also contain dialogue from Henry David Thoreau giving him “voice” to how he might respond to them. As students present, they will also mention and reconnect to Lesson One and Two (Identity and Sense of Place) and explain how their understanding of these two aspects has broaden, changed, and deepened.

Students will have two weeks to prepare their “script” and presentations will be anywhere from 2-5 minutes each. These presentations will take several class periods depending on the size of the class.