

Jerry Wollak 2015  
Barnstable High School  
Hyannis, MA  
English, Grade 11

### **Our Land and Our Writers: Discovering Barnstable's Conservation Lands Through Multiple Lenses**

The activities for this thematic approach are for high school students during their year of studying American literature, 11<sup>th</sup> grade at Barnstable High School. Students will become familiar with a particular area of the town, namely conservation land that has been set aside for recreational, non-commercial use. Each student will walk a trail at least four times over the course of the school year, once for each of the four seasons, starting in September and concluding in June. Students will observe and take field notes on their walks. Observations will be summarized with writing and possibly drawings and photographs in their Journal. A class nature walk will take place during the first week of school in order to provide training in observing and recording information. This will take place at nearby Dunns Pond, adjacent to Barnstable High School. Classroom readings by various American nature writers will be read over the course of the year in order to develop observation skills as well as literary competency and imaginative possibilities for each student. Journal entry responses to various American writers will complement the field notes and Journal summaries. The series of assignments will culminate in a student created portfolio and presentation for the class on the topic "Barnstable's Conservation Land and Insights from our Nature Writers."

#### **Essential Questions:**

- What is the purpose of setting aside conservation land in the town of Barnstable? What are the challenges of setting aside this land?
- What uses can conservation land provide for residents?
- What benefits are gained by walking, observing, and recording observations in the town's conservation lands?
- What are some of the flora and fauna in the particular conservation land?
- What changes in flora and fauna have taken place in the observed land during the four seasons?
- Has your ability to walk, observe, and write about a natural environment evolved or changed in any way over the course of the year? Explain.
- How have various writers portrayed nature in their writings?
- In his essay "Walking" what view of walking in nature has Thoreau depicted? What does he consider human's relationship to nature?
- Based on your walks, observations, and readings this year what have you learned about how you approach living in the natural environment ?

**Learning Outcomes/Objectives:** Students will be able to:

- Discover the social, natural, intellectual, and physical benefits of walking in the woods
- Identify and practice writing field notes
- Develop skills in recognizing and naming various flora and fauna
- Acquire knowledge of various American nature writers from a variety of disciplines (ecology, literary, history, creative writing, environmental, ...) and how the writers portray the relationships between people, place, community, and nature
- Develop interpretive skills in observing, writing, questioning
- Apply observational and literary techniques based on the various writers
- Analyze the political and cultural decisions, benefits, and challenges of setting aside conservation land in our community
- Critique Thoreau's essay "Walking" and interpret how the essay may or may not be relevant to one's own life
- Evaluate my own relationship to the natural environment and summarize my own philosophy of nature
- Produce a portfolio of observations and reflections based on seasonal walks in the woods, nature readings and authors' use of nature in literature

**Massachusetts State Frameworks addressed in thematic activities:**

Reading standards for literature Grades 11-12:

1. Cite strong and thorough text evidence.
2. Analyze impact of author's choices.
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text.
7. Analyze multiple interpretations of a story.
9. Demonstrate knowledge of 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century foundation works of literature.

Reading standards for informational texts Grades 11-12:

1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis.
2. Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text.
3. Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in an exposition or argument.
4. Determine an author's point of view and analyze style.

Writing standards for Grades 11-12 students:

- 2a, b, d. Write informative explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately: introduce and organize topics and concepts, develop topic by selecting significant facts, and use precise language and literary techniques.
- 3a, b, c, d, e. Write narratives using effective techniques and details: orient reader by observation, use description, build coherent whole, use precise words and phrases using sensory details, and provide a conclusion based on observation and experiences.
8. Gather relevant information from multiple sources.
9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts support analysis and reflection.

10. Write routinely over extended time frames.

Speaking and listening standards for Grades 11-12 students:

- 1a, c, e. Initiate and participate in a range of collaborative discussions.
2. Integrate multiple sources of information.
4. Present information, findings, clearly.

Language standards for Grades 11-12 students:

2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English.
- 4a,c, d. Determine or clarify meaning of words, phrases using context and reference materials.
5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in meanings.
6. Acquire and use accurately domain specific words and phrases.

**Procedures:**

Lesson 1: Class walk

Within the first week of school the class will go on a nature walk to nearby Dunns Pond to practice observing and recording what is witnessed. Students will have a field note book and a journal. Students will first record their observations and reactions in their field notebook and then summarize in their Journal responding to the topics on the Field Note Guidelines and the Journal questions.

Lesson 2: Summer walk: By the end of September students will go on their first independent walk. Each student will select one of the ten conservation land areas and go for a minimum ½ hour walk on one of the trails. Phones and other technology will not to be used except for taking pictures or recording sounds. Recording information in a field notebook will be used and then transferred to their journal upon completion of the walk. Using the Field Note Guidelines will be used for this and other walks.

Lesson 3: Autumn walk: This walk will take place during the month of October when foliage is in transition and not all the leaves are off the trees. Record observations in field guide notebook and then complete write up in Journal. In the Journal some questions to respond to include:

1. What have I noticed differently during the second walk?
2. What changes have taken place since the first walk? Be specific.
3. Have any of the class readings by naturalists or literary artists influenced my observations or thoughts or writings?

Lesson 4: Winter walk: This walk is to take place sometime from December through February, preferably when there is snow on the ground and it is cold outside. The same procedure for field notes and journal writing continues. Respond to questions number one to three again (from the Autumn walk) with specifics from the observations and readings.

Lesson 5 Spring walk: This walk is to take place during April to mid May with the same guidelines as the Winter walk, except this walk ought to include the transition

where some leafing out is taking place in plants and trees, but not a full leafing out has taken place. The same questions one to three from the Autumn walk are also incorporated into the Journal entry.

Lessons 6-10: (possibly more) Readings and responses: Throughout the year, before and after the various walking assignments, a variety of readings will be assigned. American authors' use of nature, directly or indirectly, will be examined and analyzed. These will include naturalists and environmentalists as well as literary writers who describe nature as part of a larger narrative. Besides essays, the genres will include short stories, poems, and novels. Student partners may be assigned a particular author for research and presentation to the class. The primary methods of evaluating will be reading quizzes and journal entries responding to writers. More time will be spent on Thoreau's "Walking" essay as a means of reflecting on and synthesizing students' field studies and their readings.

### **Evaluation:**

- Quiz grades for completion of field notes and journal: range from ten to twenty five points. This includes the class nature walk.
- Nature readings by various authors: reading quizzes and/or journal responses evaluated for comprehension and completion. Quiz and Journal grades will range from five to twenty points, based on length of reading or assigned entry.
- Final portfolio: typed up journal entries, drawings and/or photographs, and a reflective essay based on students walks and responses to the ideas, outlook, and techniques of the various writers. A creative artistic piece, either a visual product or fully developed poem will be included in the portfolio that is presented to the class. A rubric will be handed out displaying the various components and evaluation of the portfolio. Evaluation will be equal to a test grade of 100 points.

### **Resources:**

- Handout on how to take field notes
- Excerpts, quotes, and writings of various American nature writers. Selections from the following writers will be sources for examining diverse viewpoints on nature. These include fiction and nonfiction writers:

Henry Beston	Aldo Leopold
Bill Bryson	Jack London
Rachel Carson	William Least Heat Moon
Willa Cather	John Muir
Annie Dillard	Kathleen Norris
Ralph Waldo Emerson	O.E. Rolvaag
Louise Erdrich	Chief Seattle
Zora Neale Hurston	Wallace Stegner
Peter Jenkins	Henry David Thoreau
Jon Krakauer	Terry Tempest Williams

- In addition to “nature” writers literary fiction writers will be read over the course of the school year. Examining how authors use nature as a primary, secondary, or complementary focus will be analyzed. Works of literature and authors include: F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.
- Various poets, Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, to name two, will also be read and critiqued for the authors’ attitudes towards nature. Figurative language and other techniques by the writers will be analyzed for creative expressions regards nature.
- Henry David Thoreau’s essay “Walking” pages 557-589 in *The Portable Thoreau* edited with an introduction by Jeffrey S. Cramer Penguin Books, New York, New York, 2012.
- Town of Barnstable Conservation Lands: Names, trail maps, guides, and descriptions can be found at the town of Barnstable web site:

<http://www.town.barnstable.ma.us/Conservation/trailguides.asp>

A three ring binder copy of the website pages will be available in the classroom. The conservations trails listed are:

Bridge Creek	Otis Atwood
Crocker Neck	Sandy Neck
Hathaway’s Pond	Santuit Pond Reserve
Long Pond	West Barnstable
Old Jail Lane	Whelan

### **Field Notes Guidelines:**

Using a pocket-sized notebook is recommended for taking field notes while walking in the woods. At least one-half hour to one hour is required for each of the walks. You are welcome to do more than the required four, but each one needs to be one of enjoyment and close observation. Pen or pencil may be used, drawing or taking pictures and/or recording sounds is encouraged. Remember, this is to be a place free from the distractions of modern technologies. (No use of phones, listening to tunes, etc.) This is the place to record your first hand observations while exploring. You are encouraged to stop, sit, listen and use all your senses in writing your observations. Please do not taste or eat plants not known as safe! The purpose of the field notes is to simply record as many observations you can make while enjoying the walk. Later, you will summarize your findings in your journal entry. This is best done as soon as possible while the experience is still fresh. Try naming as many plants as you can, but drawing or photographing, and later finding the proper name is recommended. Creating sketches or diagrams may be helpful in recording observations. Consult with science teachers as well as on-line or other reliable sources for the names of animals, plants, trees, birds, insects, sky conditions, or other knowledge. Field notes will also be turned in for evaluation and comments. The following topics can serve as a checklist for your walk and note taking:

1. Identify the place, date, time, and length of walk – particular locations  
Identify road, where you started and finished. Be specific enough so someone else could easily find the location with your directions.
2. What are the weather conditions? Temperature, wind, sky, rainy, snowy? foggy?
3. What is the terrain? hilly, swampy, rocky, flat, Changeable ....?
4. What type of soil? Firm ground? Rocky? Soft? Marsh? Gravel, Sand? Various...?
5. If near water what kind of water? Salt? Fresh? Brackish? Clear? Muddy?  
Flowing? Calm? Windswept? ....? What is the shape and size of the water area?
6. Record sensory impressions (sights, sounds, textures, smells, taste).  
Identify colors, shapes, sizes. Be as specific as possible.
7. What activities are going on? Birds, animals, insects? Does time of day or weather affect activities? Wind? Calm? Quantify and record accurately as much as possible. How many squirrels, birds, animals? What is moving? Staying still? Changing? Staying the same?
8. Include whatever else is important. Are there other people on the trail? Did you have conversations with others? Or yourself? Any other observations?
9. Include your thoughts and reactions. Be sure to distinguish these from actual factual observations. Intuitions, questions, speculations, and connections you make are appropriate for your notes

### **Journal Writing Guidelines:**

1. Transfer your field notes into your Journal in a readable paragraph format. Drawings and photographs may be included. If you find out the name of something later include the new information.
2. Be sure to include all information from the field notes. Further questioning, connecting thoughts, and speculating may occur here as well.
3. Besides the recording of your walk observations and thoughts, consider the following topics in the journal entries:
  - a. Were any aspects of the walk influenced by class readings, discussions, authors', teacher's comments?
  - b. What has changed since you last visited your walking place?
  - c. Were you distracted during your walk by something taking place

in your life? Or the weather? Or busy schedule?

- d. What is your personal reaction to the assignment? Be honest in this assessment and see if it changes over time.
- e. What skills do you need to become a better observer and thinker about nature?
- f. What was the most memorable moment during the walk?

**Practical tips for walks:**

- Bring trail map so you don't get lost. There may be side trails not on the trail guides so knowing where you are is important. With people making additional trails it may be possible the trail guides may not be 100% accurate.
- Partner walks are perfectly acceptable, but remember the field notes and observations are your own as well as your journal entries.
- Plan ahead so you are not caught in the dark or a major storm.
- Know when hunting season takes place. Even though hunting may not be allowed on the conservation land there may be adjacent land where hunting is permitted.
- Wear appropriate clothing and check for ticks. Long pants and shirts plus good walking shoes are recommended. Dress properly for the season.
- Plan for mosquitos and other insects during the warm seasons.