

Awakening Our Senses: Discovering Place, Discovering Self

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Approaching Walden Summer 2014

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August 8, 2014

### **Awakening Our Senses: Discovering Place, Discovering Self**

#### **Abstract**

This unit is designed to be taught at the end of the first semester of a year-long American literature survey course. The overarching theme for the semester concerns living mindfully and intentionally: what it means to the fictional characters we meet, what it means to essayists (such as Henry David Thoreau and Annie Dillard), and what it means for us. My students explore this theme in each of the major units of study; since the semester concludes with Transcendentalism, they are uniquely positioned to reflect and reconsider this theme in light of both the individual unit and term as a whole. In this unit, students will explore the notion of mindful and intentional living through a variety of texts and experiences ranging from a “tech toss” to a sense of place field trip to a sustainable community outside of Atlanta. The goal is for them to consider ways—big and small—in which they can more authentically connect to their natural environment and gain self-awareness and quietude in the midst of a chaotic world.

**Duration of Unit:** 6-8 days (based on the 47-minute class periods at St. Pius X)

#### **Unit Objectives:**

- 1) To expose students to and engage them in a variety of writing exercises: poetry, reflective journals, literary analysis and exercises in sensory detail.
- 2) To provide students multiple opportunities to consider the effects of landscape/physical place on the individual. This will be done through nature walks, journal writing, literary analysis, and class discussion.

- 3) To use the writings of Henry David Thoreau, Annie Dillard, and Thornton Wilder as entry points into broader discussions of identity.
- 4) To expose students to myriad ways of intentional living through the study of intersections between literature, place, and self.

**Unit Outline and Lesson Overviews:**

- 1) *Lesson One: Tech Toss and Thoreau (1 period)*—This lesson will require students to complete a pre-class activity in which they rid themselves of all technology for a period of at least 4 consecutive hours. They will record their experiences, frustrations, and insights and share them with the class.
- 2) *Lesson Two: Well-Worn Paths (1 period)*—Based on Janet Burn’s text/activity/reflection journal assignments, I will provide students with a prompt that draws from the “Conclusion” portion of Thoreau’s *Walden* concerning routines and patterns and how we become enslaved by them.
- 3) *Lesson Three: Transcendentalism Then and Now: Found Poetry (1-2 periods)*—Students will explore the ideological and thematic intersections of 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century transcendentalists by constructing a found poem from the writings of Thoreau and Annie Dillard.
- 4) *Lesson Four: The Metaphor in the Moss (2 periods)*—Students will bring in an item from nature that they find particularly interesting to class. They will explore this item using each of the five senses; then, they will generate an abstract noun (such as “loss”) and create a list of its sensory associations that is structured like their first list. They will then compose unique metaphor poem that explores the connection between the two.
- 5) *Lesson Five: Sense of Place Workshop (1 period)*— After discussing the notion of “sense of place,” students will read “The Long Rain” by John Haines and discuss his use of imagery and sensory detail, the structure of the poem, and any other literary devices they see. Students will then go outside into the wooded area by the school for 15 minutes and

bring a notebook on which to jot down their observations. Upon returning to class, they'll write their own place-based poem a la John Haines that mimics his structure.

6) *Lesson Six: Lectio Divina: Awakening the Spirit and the Senses (1 period)*—An ancient Christian practice, lectio divina is a contemplative reading of scripture in which the text is read, considered, and prayed over in a slowly progressive order. The idea of lectio divina is to use the contemplative practice and discipline to hear the still, small voice of the divine within. The practice requires the participant to mindfully disengage from the noise and distractions of the outside world in order to attend to what is within. I believe that this kind of mindfulness is similar to Thoreau, and I want to introduce it to my students as a means through which they can quiet their minds and open up their souls. The texts used will be selections from nature-centered Psalms.

7) *Culminating Activity:* Students will engage in a day-long “Sense of Place” field trip to Serenbe, a sustainable community and organic farm located about an hour south of Atlanta. While there, they will participate in a labyrinth walk and learn about sustainable farming practices and the community’s commitment to wholeness and purposeful living.

## Unit Lesson Plans and Activities

### Lesson 1

#### Tech Toss: Text, Activity, Reflection Journal

**Lesson overview:** Prior to coming to class, students will be asked to rid themselves of all technology for 3-4 consecutive hours. The discussion and journaling assignment will be conducted during class the following day. This assignment is modeled after Janet Burn's reflective journal format. The prompt should be distributed to students before the "tech toss" exercise.

**Directions:** Please read the following excerpt from Thoreau's *Walden* and then complete the activity before coming to class tomorrow. We'll complete the journal and discussion in class, so don't worry about that for now.

*Our life is like a German Confederacy, made up of petty states, with its boundary forever fluctuating, so that even a German cannot tell you how it is bounded at any moment. The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which, by the way are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it, as for them, is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do it or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain. If we do not get out sleepers, and forge rails, and devote days and nights to the work, but go to tinkering upon our lives to improve them, who will build railroads? And if railroads are not built, how shall we get to heaven in season? But if we stay at home and mind our business, who will want railroads? We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. (Thoreau 274)*

**Activity:** Often, we become slaves to our stuff, particularly technology. It's hard to go anywhere today without our smart phones, iPods, and tablets. Thoreau was also confronted with technology while living at Walden Pond, as a railroad was being built not too far from the site of his cabin. When you get home today, I want you to give up all forms of technology for a period of at least 3-4 hours. This cannot be during your bedtime (nice try)! Go outside, take a walk (or saunter), talk to your parents (gasp!), write a letter, meditate, draw...the possibilities are almost limitless. Be mindful of your thoughts and feelings about your "tech toss" so we can explore them in class tomorrow.

**Preparation to write:** Think about how you felt during your "tech toss." Was it difficult for you to disengage yourself from technology? Did you find yourself feeling restless or anxious without it? How did you overcome these feelings if you had them? Re-read the passage above and pay particular attention to Thoreau's last statement, "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us" (274).

**Journal:** Write a journal entry which includes a brief description of your "tech toss:" what items you gave up and what you did during your time instead of using technology. Devote the majority of your entry to discussing the following questions: Why do you think people become slaves to their stuff? How does technology create a paradox of connecting and disengaging us from ourselves and from others? In what way(s) does technology satisfy voids that we have in our

lives? To what extent does it help us avoid confronting some of our problems, fears, insecurities, etc.? Is Thoreau right in asserting that the railroad “rides upon us” (274)?

**CCGPS Standards Addressed:**

**ELACC11-12RL4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

**ELACC11-12W3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

a. Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

**ELACC11-12W4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

**ELACC11-12W10:** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## Journal Entry Rubric

	<b>Proficient (20 pts)</b>	<b>Acceptable (15 pts)</b>	<b>Developing (10 pts)</b>	<b>Inadequate (5 pts)</b>
<p><b>Depth and accuracy of journal content</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>x2</b></p>	Response is accurate and thorough. It makes multiple connections between the author's experiences and the text both insightfully and articulately. It gives the reader something to think about.	Response is mostly accurate and thoughtful, but could be more developed. It references the experience and text in an appropriate way, but lacks great depth of insight.	Response adequately addresses the reflection questions but is lacking in both thoroughness and sophistication. It attempts to reference the text, but it may do so unevenly. Some insight is evident.	Response is fragmented or underdeveloped. Little attempt is made to connect the ideas to the text itself. Virtually no depth of insight is provided.
<p><b>Organization</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>x1</b></p>	Writing is organized in a compelling, sequential manner. Ideas clearly flow from one to the next.	Writing is organized, but may exhibit minor gaps in fluency. Transitions need some improvement.	Writing is somewhat organized, but it appears disjointed in places. Fluency is impaired due to the lapses in organization.	Writing exhibits little organization and is choppy. The ideas appear disconnected from one another, resulting in content that is confusing or misleading.
<p><b>Use of textual support and examples</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>x2</b></p>	Response is rich with textual references and personal examples; the author has made great effort to connect his/her ideas with those presented in the text selection.	Response is largely drawn from the text and personal experience, but some assertions are not supported fully. Some effort has been made to link the author and Thoreau's ideas.	Response contains minimal references to the text or the author's own experiences. Few ideological connections are made between the passage and the author's observations.	Response does not appear to connect to the text or the author's experiences in a meaningful way. Writing appears fragmented and uninspired.
<b>TOTAL:</b>				

## Lesson 2

### Well-Worn Paths: Text, Activity, Reflection Journal

**Lesson overview:** Prior to coming to class, students will be asked to complete an activity in which they will proactively try to break a habit or routine for two or three days. The discussion and journaling assignment will be conducted during class following this exercise. This assignment is modeled after Janet Burn's reflective journal format.

**Directions:** Please read the following excerpt from the "Conclusion" section of Thoreau's *Walden* and complete the activity before coming to class. We'll complete the journal and discussion in class, so don't worry about that for now.

*I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pondside; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear, that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity. (459-460)*

#### **Activity:**

- 1) Identify a daily routine or pattern. Document the steps in your routine, and be as detailed as possible. Consider the order of events, their arrangement, location, etc.
- 2) Break the routine for a period of two-three consecutive days. For example, if you usually walk down the senior hall on the way to class and stop to fill your water bottle, go a different way. If you typically eat with the same people at lunch each day, go actively seek out a different group. Document your new routine: How well did you adapt to it? Did you fall into any of your old habits by accident?

**Journal:** Please use no more than two paragraphs to respond to the first two items. Devote the bulk of your discussion to the third and fourth items.

- 1) Reflect upon your original routine/pattern. Why do you follow this? How does this pattern make you feel?
- 2) Did you have difficulty changing your routine? If so, why do you think this is the case? If it was easy, why so?
- 3) Why do you think we establish routines and patterns in general? What purpose(s) do they serve for us? What are the pros/cons of breaking routines? Is there a risk in doing so?
- 4) How do your patterns and routines influence other people's routines, and how do their routines impact yours?

#### **CCGPS Standards Addressed:**

**ELACC11-12RL4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

**ELACC11-12W3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

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<b>TOTAL:</b>				

**Lesson 3**  
**Transcendentalism Then and Now**  
**Poetry Assignment**

**Assignment description and instructions:**

**Description:** Choose a theme that is expressed in Thoreau’s *Walden* AND Annie Dillard’s “Living Like Weasels.” Identify instances of this theme through significant passages, words and phrases that express the theme within both the 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century texts. Construct a “found poem” that centers on your chosen theme using ONLY Dillard’s and Thoreau’s original language.

**Instructions:**

1. You should maintain the integrity of their original passages in terms of capitalization and spelling (i.e. look out for personification and anthropomorphism), but you are welcome to use repetition, parallel structure, metonymy, and synecdoche in your own poem. You may alter the verb tense, but the poem should be written in the 1<sup>st</sup> person POV, just as the original writings are.
2. Feel free to cut and splice Dillard and Thoreau’s words as you see fit. In other words, you do not need to have a Thoreau “section” of the poem.
3. Pay attention to line length, diction, and the visual structure of the poem itself. Remember that poetry need not be verbose in order to be powerful.
4. On a separate sheet of paper, write out one detailed 8-12 sentence paragraph in which you describe your theme and how it is expressed within the poem. Why did you choose the passages you did, and what purpose do you hope that they serve for the reader? Finally, explain how your found poem embodies the basic ideas of Transcendentalism that we discussed in class.

**CCGPS Standards Addressed:**

**ELACC11-12RL4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

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**ELACC11-12W10:** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audience.

## Poem Evaluation Rubric

<b>Content and Organization (40)</b>	<p>There is a clear theme which the poem explores and develops. The poem separates the chosen excerpts in a meaningful way that smoothly flows from one idea to the next. It is evident that the author worked to explore both the literal and figurative elements within the chosen excerpts and express these in the structure of the poem itself. The arrangement of words, phrases, and lines is intentional and fitting, resulting in a poem that supports the theme in a thoughtful and insightful manner.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">40</p>	<p>The poem exhibits adequate evidence of a theme, but it does not drive the text. It is clear that the author attempted to explore both literal and figurative elements of the chosen excerpts and translate these into the structure of the poem. The poem is arranged appropriately, but not artfully.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">30</p>	<p>The poem shows little evidence of a unifying theme and as a result, the arrangement of words, phrases, and lines may appear haphazard. The chosen excerpts are explored literally, but not figuratively.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">20</p>	<p>There is no clear theme that drives the poem. The excerpts appear to have little connection to one another which results in a poem that is difficult to read. There is no evidence that the author attempted to explore figurative meanings in the selected excerpts. There is little evidence that the writer considered how to arrange the excerpts within the poem.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>
<b>Style and Creativity (20)</b>	<p>Author's clear voice is evident through the creative use and manipulation of the original writers' language. The language is clever and uniquely re-presented for the reader.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">20</p>	<p>Author's voice can be seen in the use and manipulation of the original writers' language. The language is lively, thoughtful and well-chosen.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">15</p>	<p>Some evidence of the author's voice is present, but it is inconsistent. The author attempted to showcase the excerpts in a unique way. The language is lively.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>	<p>There is little evidence of the author's own voice in the poem. It appears that the excerpts are not stylistically linked and the language is not lively.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5</p>
<b>MLA and Conventions (20)</b>	<p>No spelling, misquotation, or grammatical errors. Any included punctuation correctly supports the thematic and artistic endeavors of the writer.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">20</p>	<p>Very few errors in spelling, misquoting, and grammar. The punctuation is well-chosen and appropriate.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">15</p>	<p>There are some errors in spelling, misquoting, and grammar, but they are not distracting. The punctuation appears inconsistent or poorly placed.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>	<p>There are multiple errors in spelling, misquoting, and grammar throughout the poem. Little effort has been made considering punctuation choices or execution.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5</p>
<b>Reflection (20)</b>	<p>Reflective paragraph is thoughtful and well-considered; it clearly conveys the author's intentions behind the poem composition and makes an effort to effectively justify the author's linguistic and structural choices. The writer articulates connections to Transcendentalist ideas effectively.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">20</p>	<p>Reflective paragraph meets assignment criteria, but it exhibits some lapses in fluency and depth. Connections between the poem and Transcendentalism are not wholly clear.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">15</p>	<p>Reflective paragraph fulfills most of the assignment criteria, but it is not very thoughtful. The writer articulates few connections between the poem and Transcendentalism.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>	<p>Reflective paragraph fails to adequately fulfill the assignment criteria. The writing appears haphazard or disconnected. No articulation is made between the poem and Transcendentalism.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5</p>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Comments:</b>			<b>TOTAL SCORE:</b>

## Lesson 4

### The Metaphor in the Moss: Finding the Extraordinary in the Ordinary

#### Lesson Overview:

The purpose of this lesson is to help students see how seemingly ordinary objects in the natural world can be viewed in unique and meaningful ways. The day before the lesson, students will be asked to bring in an object from nature that holds particular interest to them. TTW encourage students to bring something to class that is indigenous to the area, but they may bring in other items if they choose (such as a seashell).

#### Activities:

- 1) TTW begin the lesson by distributing a passage from *Walden* in which Thoreau uses a physical object as an entry point into the exploration of a universal truth or idea. TTW explain to students that Thoreau often uses seemingly ordinary objects in an extraordinary way. TTW read the following passage from “Economy” aloud to students.

*One day, when my axe had come off and I had cut a green hickory for a wedge, driving it with a stone, and had placed the whole to soak in a pond-hole in order to swell the wood, I saw a striped snake run into the water, and he lay on the bottom, apparently without inconvenience, as long as I stayed there, or more than a quarter or an hour; perhaps because he had not yet fairly come out of the torpid state. It appeared to me that for a like reason men remain in their present low and primitive condition; but if they should feel the influence of the spring of springs arousing them, they would of necessity rise to a higher and more ethereal life. I had previously seen the snakes in frosty mornings in my path with portions of their bodies still numb and inflexible, waiting for the sun to thaw them. (Thoreau 230)*

- 2) TTW ask students to locate the place in the passage where Thoreau shifts from a literal discussion of snakes to a figurative consideration of mankind. TTW ask students to use the text to explain the similarities that Thoreau presents between snakes and men. TTW draw a T-chart on the board to help them identify these elements.

Characteristics of a snake	Characteristics of man
Snake stays in the bottom of the pond a long time because it hasn't fully woken up from hibernation	Man often remains “low and primitive” because nothing has inspired them to “awaken” and move into a new state of being

- 3) TTW instruct students to place their objects on a table in front of the classroom. They will be given a choice to either explore their own object or choose one that another person brought with them to class. The students will (TSW) select which object they'd like to explore.
- 4) TSW take out a sheet of paper and list each of the five senses, leaving a several lines between each one. TTW tell students that they are going to explore their object using each of the five senses in 2-minute segments. They will write down words or phrases that

evoke a given sense in the space provided. TTW tell students that they may list as many descriptions for each sense as they wish, but they should try to write for the entirety of each sense segment. TTW use a stopwatch to keep track of time. This should last approximately 10 minutes.

- 5) TSW briefly share some of their observations with the class. TTW then tell the students that like Thoreau, they will use their chosen object as an entry point into a more abstract concept. They will do this via a metaphor poem. TTW distribute a post-it note to each student and ask them to write down an abstract noun (such as loss) and fold it up.
- 6) TSW place their post-it notes into a jar and TTW mix them; TTW then ask students to select a random post-it from the jar. TSW use their natural object along with the abstraction on their post-it to create a new five senses list (see step 4).
- 7) After completing the second five senses list, TTW distribute the instructions for students' poems. TSW compose an original poem that explores their natural objects and abstractions via a metaphor poem. TSW be encouraged to items from their five senses lists to help them. Alternately, students can choose to write a passage that explores the connection between the objects a la Thoreau.

#### **CCGPS Standards Addressed:**

**ELACC11-12W4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**ELACC11-12W10:** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**ELACC11-12RL10:** By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

**ELACC11-12RL4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

## The Metaphor in the Moss: Poem Criteria and Evaluation Checklist

### Directions:

- 1) Should begin your metaphor with the X/Y pairing that you drew in class. Your “X” item must be your abstract noun, while the “Y” item will be your concrete noun
- 2) The poem should be 15-20 lines long
- 3) The first line should be your metaphor:  
Example: “Mankind is a sleeping snake.”
- 4) Continue the exploration of this metaphor in your successive lines of the poem.
- 5) Use at least three of the five senses in your poem. See your lists for help and inspiration!
- 6) Come up with a thought-provoking title for your poem.
- 7) Your poem should be typed in 12 point Times New Roman font and double-spaced. Be sure to include an MLA header and pagination.

### Evaluation Checklist:

#### *Title:*

Is original and pertinent to the poem

1      2      3      4      5

#### *Attention to Directions:*

Poem satisfies length requirements. The metaphor is succinctly stated. The author employs at least three of the five senses in the poem.

5      10      15      20      25

#### *Content:*

The poem offers a thoughtful, detailed exploration of the metaphor and approaches it from a variety of angles. It is clear that the author carefully considered the connections between the natural object and the abstraction. The resulting work is artful, original, and insightful.

10      15      20      25      30      35      40      45      50

Total Score: \_\_\_\_ /80 points

Additional comments:

## Lesson Five Sense of Place Workshop

### Lesson Overview:

Based on Jessica Bane Robert's sense of place workshop at the Thoreau Institute, students will consider the broad notion and various meanings of "sense of place." They will consider the idea both in a literal and figurative sense, which will help them to better understand not only their own rootedness, but the writings of other place-based writers such as Thoreau and Emerson. The lesson will be divided into three parts: discussion, a reading of John Haines's poem "The Long Rain," and their own mini nature walk and subsequent place-based writing.

### Activities:

The teacher will (TTW) introduce students to the term "sense of place" and ask them for their initial impressions and thoughts about it. After a brief discussion, TTW point out some features of "sense of place:"

- 1) Knowing where we are (and where we are from) helps to ground us both literally and figuratively. Being connected to and rooted in nature helps maintain this groundedness, and it helps keep us human. If we respect nature and all life, we must behave differently, behave honorably. Having a sense of place helps to give us purpose and a vision. It's where we feel a part of us is and will always be. It is where we feel like home, even if it is not home.
- 2) Routines can help to establish a sense of place because they encourage feelings of comfort and often safety. They are reliable in an often unreliable world.
- 3) Ultimately, "sense of place" is a place of peace within oneself.

After discussing some of the characteristics of "sense of place," TTW show students "The Long Rain" by John Haines on the projector. TTW read the poem aloud twice, asking students to pay attention to the poem's craft and structure as well as its use of sensory detail to help establish a "sense of place" for the speaker. After reading the poem, TTW invite students to share their observations about the poem's structure and literary devices. The students may comment about the way the stanza length builds (2 lines, 3 lines, 4 lines), the vivid use of auditory and olfactory imagery, etc. TTW then share with students an original poem that is modeled after "The Long Rain."

*"A Walden Summer"*

*A mower hums  
In a field beyond the house.*

*The wind rustles,  
Maple trees,  
Calling to each other in turn.*

*Below me  
A dragonfly considers--  
Moving ever closer,  
Then away.*

TTW tell students that in order to explore “sense of place” more tangibly, they will go out into the woods surrounding the school for a short period of observation and reflection in nature. TTW encourage students to use all their senses; they might want to close their eyes to experience their place more fully. The students will (TSW) go outside and spread out to begin their observations. They may bring a field journal with them if they so desire. After 20 minutes, TTW call the class back together and they will return to the classroom. TSW take a few minutes to jot down their experiences and observations and may share some of these with the class. TSW begin to compose their own poem a la “The Long Rain” so that their own has a similar structure and craft to it. TSW finish composing their poems for homework if needed and will share them in a class reading the following day. Because this is considered a formative assessment and intended as a means through which students can understand “sense of place,” no grade will be assigned for this activity.

**CCGPS Standards Addressed:**

**ELACC11-12W4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**ELACC11-12W10:** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**ELACC11-12RL10:** By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

## **Lesson Six**

### **Lectio Divina: Awakening the Spirit and the Senses**

**Background:** An ancient Christian practice, *lectio divina* is a contemplative reading of scripture in which the text is read, considered, and prayed over in a slowly progressive order. The idea of lectio divina is to use the contemplative practice and discipline to hear the still, small voice of the divine within. The practice requires the participant to mindfully disengage from the noise and distractions of the outside world in order to attend to what is within. I believe that this kind of mindfulness is similar to Thoreau, and I want to introduce it to my students as a means through which they can quiet their minds and open up their souls. The texts used will be selections from nature-centered biblical scripture. I intend for this to be the final lesson of the unit.

#### **Lesson Overview:**

TTW introduce the concept of lectio divina to students using the online resource *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*. At the beginning of class, TTW point students to the website and read the sections entitled “The Process of Lectio Divina” and “The Underlying Rhythm of Lectio Divina” to help them understand the method and purpose for participating in the practice. TTW explain to students that the goal of the exercise is to open themselves to the spirit of the divine through listening, meditating upon, and receiving the words of God. TTW give students a handout on how to conduct the practice.

TTW distribute the scripture readings to students and ask them to take a pencil with them to briefly jot down their revelations on the scripture handout following the exercise. The class will then move to the chapel on campus; students will be asked to spread out and get into a comfortable posture before beginning. TTW will guide students’ slowly through the practice, which should otherwise be conducted in silence.

Because of the personal nature and goal of this exercise, no grade will be assigned to this activity.

#### **CCGPS Standards Addressed:**

**ELACC11-12SL1:** 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.

## Lectio Divina Scripture Readings

### **Psalm 23:1-4 (The New American Bible)**

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not  
want.*

*In verdant pastures he gives me  
repose; 2*

*Beside restful waters he leads me;  
he refreshes my soul. 3*

*He guides me in right paths  
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk in the dark valley 4*  
*I fear no evil; for you are at my  
Side*

*With your rod and your staff  
that give me courage.*

### **Psalm 104: 10-15 (The New American Bible)**

*You send forth springs into the 10*  
*watercourses*

*that wind among the mountains,*

*And give drink to every beast of the 11*  
*field,*

*till the wild asses quench their  
thirst.*

*Beside them the birds of heaven 12*  
 *dwell;*

*from among the branches they send  
forth their song.*

*You water the mountains from your 13*  
*palace;*

*the earth is replete with the fruit of  
your works.*

*You raise grass for the cattle, 14*  
*and vegetation for men's use,*

*Producing bread from the earth,*

*and wine to gladden men's hearts, 15*  
*So that their faces gleam with oil,*

*and bread fortifies the hearts of  
men.*

## **Lectio Divina Progression**

### **Listening to the voice of God**

- 1) TTW say, "Get into a comfortable position in which your body feels relaxed, yet alert. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Listen to your breath as you inhale deeply and exhale slowly. Allow the tension from your muscles to dissipate."
- 2) TTW say, "As you are breathing deeply, allow yourself to think about what has happened to you this week, this day. Think about what things have kept you from being more connected to the divine. Please listen to the words God has for you."
- 3) TTW read the first scripture passage slowly. After the initial reading, TTW say, "When you hear the scripture again, listen to a word or phrase that is meaningful to you."
- 4) TTW read the passage again and allow 1-2 minutes of silence for students to consider significant elements of the passage.

### **Reflecting on the scripture's meaning for us**

- 1) TTW read the passage again and ask students to ask themselves what part(s) of the passage speak to them today. Silence for 2-3 minutes as students think and consider. TTW encourage them to briefly jot down a word or phrase to help them reflect.

### **Considering what God asks of us**

- 1) TTW read the passage once more. TTW ask students to reflect on what they believe God wants them to do or believe after reflecting upon his words in scripture. Students may jot their responses down if they choose.
- 2) TTW allow students a few minutes of quiet reflection.

### **Sharing our lectio experiences with others**

- 1) TTW call students back together and invite students to share their experiences with one another.

## **Culminating Activity**

### **Sense of Place Field Trip to Serenbe**

**Field Trip Overview:** In order to more fully experience and understand Thoreau's experience of retreating to nature, students will travel to the Serenbe community in Chattahoochee Hills, Georgia, which is about an hour south of Atlanta. Serenbe is something of a modern utopia; its residents are committed to nature and wellbeing. The founders left Atlanta to build a community centered around sustainability, holistic living, and emotional wellbeing. The community also includes a 25-acre organic farm, which students will explore while they are there. While there, students will learn about the purpose of Serenbe, sustainable farming practices, and have opportunities to meditatively walk the labyrinth and journal.

#### **Possible Field Trip Activities:**

- 1) Lecture and discussion about Serenbe's ecology, its sustainable farming practices, and their effects on the landscape
- 2) Tour of Serenbe farms and pastures
- 3) Lunch at The Farmhouse, a farm-to-table restaurant
- 4) Guided exploration of the labyrinth (details below)
- 5) Time for reflective journaling

#### **Rationale and Explanation of the Labyrinth Exercise:**

Labyrinths originated over 5,000 years ago and have been an important part of Christian tradition and history. The structure of the labyrinth is highly symbolic and for Christians, is meant to parallel to the spiritual condition of the soul, which is sometimes nearer to the divine than others but which always (and ultimately) moves towards it. Outside of a spiritual dimension, walking the labyrinth is a quieting, centering process that allows space for deep meditation and awareness of self. Robert Ferre writes of the link "between nature and the labyrinth. In our modern society we have lost contact with the changing of the seasons, the constellations, the freshness of the air. Walking an outdoor labyrinth incorporates these aspects to enhance our experience" ("Outdoor Labyrinths," n.d., para. 3).

Since Transcendentalism is largely concerned with moving beyond the temporal and baser aspects of daily life, the labyrinth offers students a more immediate means through which to disengage themselves from the outside world. Serenbe's labyrinth was created by early residents who brought rocks from their own homesteads to construct the labyrinth. I plan to have my students walk the labyrinth communally; with each student entering the maze at about thirty second intervals because the communal practice of walking the labyrinth can function in powerful ways. Ferre notes that "there is only one problem of the world, expressed in many variations: separation from God and each other. The only solution is to join together, to move from one to One" ("Labyrinths Build Community," n.d., para.3). My own experiences support this. When walking the labyrinth communally, it becomes clear that all are moving towards the center at different paces; at one turn, you may seem very close to the center and at the next, so very far from it. It is inspirational to walk the maze while others do the same; it reminds us of the ultimate journey that all of us are on, although our paths often seem different. I believe that the natural setting and symbolic structure of the labyrinth will speak deeply and personally to students, and I hope that they find a way to center themselves amidst an otherwise chaotic world.

**Unit Materials and Resources Needed:**

- ⊗ Internet access
- ⊗ Ceiling-mounted projector
- ⊗ Post-it notes
- ⊗ Journals/composition books for students to use
- ⊗ Busses for transporting students to and from Serenbe
- ⊗ 4-5 parent or adult chaperones for field trip
- ⊗ Access to outdoor space for nature walk

**Texts:**

- ⊗ *The Portable Thoreau*, Edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer
- ⊗ “Living like Weasels” by Annie Dillard
- ⊗ “The Long Rain” by John Haines
- ⊗ Access to the website *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*  
(<http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html>)

## References

- Dillard, A. (1991). Living like weasels. *Sisters of the Earth*. Retrieved from <http://www.courses.vcu.edu/ENG200-lad/dillard.htm>
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- Haines, J. (1993). The long rain. In *The owl in the mask of the dreamer*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press.
- Thoreau, H.D. (2012). *Walden*. J.S. Cramer (Ed.). New York, NY: Penguin Classics.