

Acknowledging and Embracing a Sense of Place

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Sense of Place Unit Plan
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Abstract: This unit plan is made up of five lessons and has been designed to take a week to complete, based on my school's schedule. The new schedule at my school is composed of five class periods per week, four that are 51 minutes long and one that is 80 minutes long. The purpose of this unit plan is to teach my students about their sense of place, to embrace the connection to their current location, and to take a closer look at the environment that surrounds them. I designed this unit to be applicable to the range of students that I teach, which includes English Language Learners and students on IEPs to AP U.S. History students. Students will begin the unit by learning about what a sense of place is and the difference between that, location and locale. They will then read chapter 4 from Walden by Henry David Thoreau, which is titled *Sounds*. Students will be asked to use direct quotes from the text to answer questions based on this reading. They will then use the ideas presented in this excerpt and apply them to their own surroundings. First, students will learn about and walk to the Minuteman Bikeway, which runs behind my school, and they will make observations and connections based on the reading. The unit ends with a field trip to Walden Pond, to walk the trails and see the place, hear the sounds, smell the scents, etc. that Thoreau describes in the excerpt. Students will be assessed in various ways throughout the unit - written responses using quotes from the text, participation in class discussions, engagement in activities outside of the classroom (Minuteman Bikeway and Walden Pond). However, I am really hoping that students will take away a true sense of place at the end of this unit, which can't be formally assessed in a classroom setting. The worst case scenario is that a student doesn't complete any of the assignments but spends some time outside, interacting with their environment, and I'm okay with that.

Essential Questions: What is a sense of place and why do some people feel more connected to their surroundings than others? How can one's sense of place impact their relationship(s) with their surroundings? Why do some people feel it is necessary to protect certain locations and how does this impact your life in your town, your state and your country today? How have technology and nature coexisted in the United States and how does this relationship work today?

Learning Objectives:

- Students will work cooperatively, in pairs, small groups and as a large group
- Students will be able to define location, locale and sense of place.
- Students will be able to acknowledge and embrace their current location/sense of place.
- Students will read a literary work and use direct quotes to answer questions based on that work.
- Students will participate in class discussions
- Students will explore the Minuteman Bikeway, both its history and its appearance, and will make connections from Walden to this location
- Students will participate in a field trip to Walden Pond to learn more about Thoreau and to explore the locations that are described in *Sounds*

Common Core Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.9

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Massachusetts U.S. History Standard Addressed:

USI.34

Analyze the emergence of the Transcendentalist movement through the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and American literature, including the contributions of Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. (H)

Lesson One - What is a sense of place?

Students will be introduced to the concept of a sense of place in this lesson. The teacher's role will be primarily to keep the pace of the lesson, answer questions as they come up, and lead a class discussion on location, locale and sense of place.

Student Activities:

- As students enter the classroom, they will see the Do Now written on the board in the front of the classroom. Do Now - Take two minutes to write a response to the following question: "What is a place?"
- The students will share their definitions with their neighbors (Think/Pair/Share) and then the class will discuss this concept.
- The teacher, using information from the Resor article on Place-Based Education, will describe the "three fundamental aspects of place" (186) - location, locale and sense of place.
- Students will be asked to find the location of Arlington, MA on a map and to provide the absolute location using latitude and longitude. They will then be asked to describe the relative location of Arlington, MA - it's a suburb of Boston, it's on Route 2, it's next to Cambridge and Lexington, etc.
- The teacher will introduce the concept of locale, which will then be defined as "the actual setting in which people carry on their lives" (186). Examples will be provided, such as roads, buildings, trees, etc. Students will be asked to jot down a description of their locale. These descriptions will then be shared with the class and the teacher will write them on the board in the front of the room.
- The teacher will introduce the third aspect of place, sense of place, and will define it as "a phrase that geographers use to describe the subjective and emotional attachment a person has to a place" (186).

The teacher will ask the class to rephrase this definition with simpler language. For instance, what do you feel when you think of Arlington? The teacher will give examples from their life - Arlington is where I come to work every day, the playground with the giant slides carved out of the hill is a favorite place to bring my sons, I can get my favorite food (Brigham's hot fudge) on Mass. Ave., etc.

- The teacher will then ask students to take a few minutes to write down what they feel when they think of Arlington. This may be a difficult task for some students, perhaps they just moved here and don't know the town well, they may hate the town because it reminds them of negative memories, etc. Students will be given the opportunity to share if they want but will not be required to. It is anticipated that students will list more manmade items - buildings, roads, stores, etc. - rather than flora and fauna. The class will discuss why they think that is.
- Students will be given a piece of blank paper and will be given 10 minutes to illustrate the place of Arlington, MA. They can incorporate any of the three aspects that have been introduced and discussed.
- As the exit ticket for the class, each student will have to hand in their illustration with the definitions of location, locale, and sense of place written on the back.

Lesson Two - Connection to place and introduction to Walden

Students will build on the idea of sense of place and be given a brief overview of Walden. They will then read chapter IV, *Sounds*. Students will read the eBook version that is available from Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/205/205-h/205-h.htm#linkW4>). Students will use Chromebooks in the classroom to read this selection. By reading a digital version, students can enlarge the font size and look up words if necessary. This lesson will address the coexistence of nature and technology, one of the essential questions for this unit.

Student Activities:

- The Do Now activity will be for students to talk in small groups about this essential question: What is a sense of place and why do some people feel more connected to their surroundings than others? The whole class will reconvene and discuss responses.
- The class will have already learned about transcendentalism and Thoreau before this unit. A brief class discussion to review these topics will occur. The students will be reminded that Walden was first published in 1854 and we will discuss the historical context of this piece. We will also review Thoreau's motivation for writing this book.
- Students will be asked to go to the class website and click on the hyperlink to Project Gutenberg's eBook of Walden. They will then be instructed to select Sounds from the menu, which will bring them to the beginning of chapter IV. If a student wants a hard copy to write on, they will have the option to print one at this time.

- Students will be given the remainder of an 80-minute period to read this chapter and complete the following activity:
 - Directions: You will be reading chapter IV, *Sounds*, in Walden. You must answer the following questions on a Google doc and share the document with me. Save your document as your last name, Sounds activity. For example, I would title my document Clark Sounds activity. Please make sure to use direct quotes from the written work to support your answers to the following questions. If you need to define a word, feel free to look it up online or use one of the dictionaries on the shelf.
 - What does Thoreau think about technology? How do you know?
 - How does technology impact nature?
 - How do the two coexist?
 - Select three quotes from this piece that affected you. What are the quotes and why did you pick them?
 - Can you relate to anything that Thoreau is discussing in this chapter? Why or why not?
- This assignment should be finished for homework if more time is needed.

Lesson Three - Review of *Sounds* and Engaging with Place

Students will review the previous day's assignment in a whole class discussion. They will then discuss their interactions with the outdoors and will learn about the Minuteman Bikeway that runs behind the school. This will prepare them for tomorrow's lesson, in which they will be going outside and walking along the Bikeway and observing the flora and fauna.

Student Activities:

- The Do Now for this class will be written on the board and students will individually respond in writing to this essential question: How can one's sense of place impact their relationship(s) with their surroundings? This will then be discussed as a class.
- Each student will get a Chromebook and open to their assignment from yesterday's class.
- There will be a whole class discussion about *Sounds*, the questions, and the quotes that students selected.
- The class will then have a discussion about how each student spends time outdoors every day.
 - Do you walk to school?
 - Do you play a sport or have a hobby that takes place outside?
 - Do you ever just walk in the woods? Why or why not?
 - Do you ever use the Minuteman Bikeway that runs behind the school? Why or why not? If you do use it, what do you do on it? (many students walk to school on this path)

- Students will then use their Chromebooks to learn more about the Minuteman Bikeway by reading through this website: <http://www.minutemanbikeway.org/Pages/Introduction.html>. They will then answer the following questions:
 - Why was the Minuteman Bikeway created?
 - What are the major uses of the Bikeway?
 - What is significant about where the Bikeway is located?
 - Why would four towns collaborate to manage the Bikeway?
 - How does the Bikeway impact your life?
- If necessary, this activity will be completed for homework.
- Students will be told to bring appropriate outerwear to tomorrow's class because they will be walking along the Minuteman Bikeway.

Lesson Four - Engaging with Place

Students will be going outside and walking along the Minuteman Bikeway during this class. They will be asked to closely observe nature and will also be introduced to the topic of preservation.

Student Activities:

- The class will be walking along the Minuteman Bikeway during this period.
- Each student will be asked to bring a notebook and something to write/draw with.
- As a class, this essential question will be discussed before students begin walking: Why do some people feel it is necessary to protect certain locations and how does this impact your life in your town, your state and your country today?
 - It is my hope that students will bring up the reasons why the Bikeway was created, the significance of the site, and the impact on their lives. I also hope that the topics of state and national parks are brought up. In the case of the Bikeway, the route was "preserved" mainly for transportation and commuter ease. We will talk about why certain areas are preserved or protected for other reasons as well.
- The teacher will prepare the students for the walk.
 - Many of you travel on this route on a daily basis. Have you ever stopped to look at the flora or fauna (define these terms if necessary) that you pass? Why or why not?
 - Each of you must select something in nature and write about or draw it. You should focus on one item - a blade of grass, a leaf, a flower, a bee, a squirrel, etc.
 - Take note of how nature and technology coexist in this place. Can you compare this to Thoreau's observations in *Sounds*? How does this area compare to the rest of Arlington?
- Homework: Students must type a one-page, double-spaced response to the following question and share it via Google docs. How have technology and nature coexisted in the United States and how

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does this relationship work today? Cite specific examples from what you've learned so far in history class and well as what you learned today. Why would some people be in favor of technology at the expense of nature? Why would some people be in favor of nature at the expense of technological advancement? What is your view on this issue?

- Students should come to school prepared for a field trip to Walden Pond in the morning. The field trip will take place rain or shine.

Lesson Five - Visiting Walden Woods and Walking in Thoreau's Footsteps

Students will end this unit by taking a field trip to Walden Woods and walking through the places that Thoreau describes in Walden. Walden Pond is approximately 10 miles from Arlington High School.

Student Activities:

- The teacher will take students on a field trip to Walden Woods where they will discuss Walden and walk through the same woods that Thoreau walked through.
- Students will be asked to make connections to *Sounds* throughout the walk, particularly when approaching the modern railroad line that runs through the woods.
- The essential question - How have technology and nature coexisted in the United States and how does this relationship work today? - will be discussed as students are walking through the woods and in the journal entries that students complete for homework.
- The topic of preservation will also be revisited.
- Students will be asked to write a journal entry about their experience walking in the woods. It will be submitted anonymously, so they can provide honest feedback.
- It is my hope that this is a unit that students enjoy and that will, at the very least, make them more aware of their surroundings.

Bibliography

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diff. between preservation & conservation
As a history teacher - Bob Baron's film

