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Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickinson: Finding the “I” in Society

Introduction:

One of the recurring ideas for the texts in our junior year is the tension between the individual and society. Throughout many of our core texts, we see an individual struggle against the forces of society, which is demanding them to conform to a set of ideals and morals (Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, Huck Finn in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and even Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*). Oftentimes, these protagonists reclaim a sense of freedom and individuality in a natural location—for Hester, the forest; for Huck, the raft, and for Janie, the “muck”—where they can assert their individual selves and passions without the fear of judgment. But, as Thoreau may have realized, one cannot remove oneself from society forever; each of these protagonists must return to it. Yet, because of their self-reflection and discovery in the “wild,” they are able to internally carry with them their developed sense of individuality in the midst of societal pressures. My unit, thus, is designed around getting the students to think first about who they are in this very time and place in their lives. They will do this through frequent visits to their String Journal location, Thoreau exercises, and a class Nature walk. The idea here is to replicate what we will see in the novels of the year: protagonists leaving their home place and visiting another natural location where they become more in tune with who they are. While doing that, students will also consider American society and identity that places certain pressures on the individual, and finally, through our study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickinson, see the possibility of finding oneself and maintaining that sense of individuality in the midst of a bustling world.

Short Abstract of Curriculum Unit:

By reading Emerson, Thoreau and Dickinson, students will be introduced to individuals whose writing and, in the case of Thoreau and Dickinson, whose lifestyles were nonconformist for their times. Students will also be keeping a String Journal (courtesy of Janet Burne), participate in several Thoreau exercises (again, courtesy of Janet Burne), and finally write a personal essay in which they choose someone from their own lives who upholds the transcendental principle of being true to oneself. The goal with the writing exercises is to have students see that even though these writers wrote in the 19th century about their society, their ideas still have resonance today. As juniors, my students are at the crossroads of their high school career, making decisions about life after high school while also balancing peer, family, and teacher pressures. I want my students to live deliberately and to choose an authentic path for themselves. I hope this unit makes them think about what they truly want and how to make it possible.

Duration: 2-3 weeks

List of Reading Materials:

- “The Voice” by Shel Silverstein
- excerpts from “Self-Reliance” by Emerson
- excerpts from “Walden” by Thoreau
- “The World is Too Much with Us” by Wordsworth
- “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” by Whitman
- selections of Emily Dickinson poems

List of Equipment

- laptop
- overhead project and document camera
- large sticky paper
- sharpies/markers
- handouts included within the curriculum unit below
- *Into the Wild* DVD

State Standards

R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it.

R4: 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.

R9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

W9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

SL1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range or 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.

Pre-Assignments

Because the Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickinson unit is the first of the school year, I will right away be starting with the String Journals. I will be handing out these pieces of string on the first or second day of class and having students write their first entry during the first full week of school. I want students to immediately get connected to a place in their neighborhood and to use that place to self-reflect just as Thoreau did in Walden. On the first or second day of school, I will also be assigning a personal essay entitled “Who are

you?” Students are to answer this question in a 2-4 page typed response. I am not giving them any further instructions than those. The goal here is for students to articulate who they are before we start the transcendental unit which will hopefully challenge our ideas of self and/or illuminate why we do some of the things we do. As the first writing sample of the year, this “essay” will also give me an opportunity to get to know them and to see a writing sample right away. I am purposely not giving them too many instructions for this essay to see how they handle a nonconformist assignment and what they choose to do with it.

Lesson One: Defining America (1 class period)

Abstract: This lesson comes as students are writing the “Who are you” essays. As they are thinking about their individual selves, we as a class will be thinking of our nation’s identity. From the beginning of the year, I want to emphasize this tension between the individual and society, one of the central themes of the literature we will study.

Goals/Objectives:

- Students will be able to work in small groups to brainstorm elements of the American identity
- Students will present their ideas to the class
- Students will use their group discussion and class discussion to write a personal piece (one page) on American identity

Procedure

1. Teacher will divide students into groups of 4 or 5. Each group will have poster paper & markers.
2. Students will have 10 minutes to fill their poster paper with as many images, words, phrases, places, events that are “American.” As students prepare their posters and debate what words and images should be included, the teacher should monitor the work and address any concerns students may have.
3. After 10 minutes, teachers will ask each group to hang their poster on display and to be prepared to explain what each item contributes to our idea of America. Teacher will ask the following prompts to lead into discussion:
 - a. What are some symbols or words that occur on the majority of the posters? What makes them so obviously “American”?
 - b. Which symbols are political? Religious? Socio-Cultural? Historical?
 - c. Which symbols are more regional? Would an American from another region relate to that symbol as much as another? Why or why not?
 - d. Which words or symbols display a more positive side to being American? Which might be perceived as negative?
 - e. Are there any words or symbols on the posters that you think are NOT representative of America? (Allow students to defend why they placed those items on the poster and allow students to respond thoughtfully to those decisions.)
 - f. Are there any symbols or words that are more reflective of America TODAY as opposed to the America of decades ago? Has what it means to be an American changed over time? Why or why not?

*Teacher may decide to record notes from this discussion -- or to have a student volunteer from each group to record discussion--to create a massive Map of American Identity on the front board or another poster.

HW: Using our class notes and our discussion, how easy it was to list those American traits. Has it always been that easy? Considering we are a nation of immigrants, from so many backgrounds, religions, and experiences, does it surprise anyone that we feel so immediate with our responses to being American? In what ways can these generalizations pose problems? (*Assessment: This will be a homework journal of 10 points assessed on thought and effort*)

Lesson Two: Thinking Transcendental (1 class period)

Abstract: On this class day, students will come in with their “Who are you?” essays as we begin to delve into the principles of transcendentalism. I want to introduce the ideas of the movement before giving students an introductory PowerPoint or any of the readings.

Goals:

- Students will read and respond to a short poem
- Students will consider the pros/cons of listening to one’s “inner voice” by brainstorming a list of contemporary figures who have done that and the impact they have had on society
- Students will listen to their “inner voice” and complete a survey asking for their opinion on some of the basic tenets of transcendentalism
- Students will engage in small group and large group discussion of the survey in a Four Corner format
- Students will write a possible definition for “transcendentalism” based on the class activities and questions of the day

Procedure:

1. Pass out copies of Shel Silverstein’s “The Voice.”
2. Have two different students read the poem out loud.
3. Give students 10 minutes to “free write”. What is the speaker of the poem advocating for? What lines are enlightening/troublesome? What do you think of the speaker’s message?
4. Brainstorm individuals in society (pop culture, politics, media, etc.) who have listened to their “inner voice.” Compile a list on the board. What do we notice about these individuals? What are the pros and cons of being true to one’s inner voice as Silverstein advises us to do?
5. Distribute transcendental survey (which I will not reveal as that). Students can Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree to the statements and then write an explanation for their position.
6. Four Corners: Each corner of the room will be labeled Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. As we go through the transcendental statements, students will proceed to the corner of the room that aligns with their opinion. They will take a moment to pair/share with a partner there before I ask a few people to speak out to the whole group.
7. Exit Slip: Based on today’s class discussion of the poem and survey, write down a working definition for transcendentalism. This is like the game balderdash in which students receive an unfamiliar word and have to write an authentic dictionary definition.

Assessment:

- Observation of students’ completion of the survey and participation in the Four Corners activity

- Exit slip will be a class participation grade; points received for completion

HW: Read excerpts from Emerson's "Self-Reliance." Write down 2 quotes that made you react positively and two that made you react negatively. Explain each choice in a few sentences.

Kavanaugh
English 11

Directions: Carefully consider the following statements and decide if you SA (strongly agree), A (agree), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree). Explain how you feel in a few sentences.

1. It is extremely important for me to spend time alone.
SA A SD D

2. I need to spend time in the outdoors. SA A D SD

3. When someone says something offensive, I always speak up and disagree with them. SA A D SD

4. I worry about other people's opinions of me. SA A D SD

5. My clothes and appearance are not important to me.
SA A D SD

Lesson Three: Transcendentalism and Emerson (1 class period)

Abstract: After a day of thinking transcendental, I will reveal the basic tenets of transcendentalism through an introductory PowerPoint. First, of course, I will read out some of the closest definitions from the exit slips the day before and some of the misses (anonymously and just for a laugh). We will then see the application of these ideas in the discussion of the previous night's reading of "Self-Reliance."

Goals:

- Students will be able to articulate the basic tenets of transcendentalism
- Students will be able understand the cultural and historical background of the movement
- Students will be able to identify and explain points from Emerson's "Self-Reliance" with which they agree and/or disagree

Procedure:

1. Introductory PowerPoint on Transcendentalism and Emerson
2. Gallery Walk
 - a. Students will have come into class with two passages that resonated with them and two that they took issue with.
 - b. Around the room, I will have posted large sticky sheets with a (+) for positive ideas in Emerson and a (-) for problematic ideas. Students will copy their passages on the appropriate sticky.
 - c. In-class Journaling: What do you notice about where things landed? Do you see any overlap or contradictions? Was there one quote that you really agreed or disagreed with that your classmate put up?
 - d. Class Discussion: Ask students to share their observations beach ball style (when a classmate says something related to what you were thinking, you join in with your observation).
 - e. Wrap-Up: On the front board, we will summarize the main threads of Emerson's essay with key words (i.e. self-trust, individuality, etc.)

Assessment:

- Students will receive homework credit for bringing in their four quotes from "Self-Reliance." I will check for these at the start of class before we begin the Gallery Walk.

HW: Thoreau Exercise #1 (see handout)

Thoreau Exercise #1*

Directions: Please read the following quote from Walden and respond to it by completing both the pre-writing and journal activities listed below.

“It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; 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.”—Walden, “Conclusion”

1. Preparation to write—Identify something you currently do simply because that’s the way your parent/family/friends do it, or because that’s the way it’s always been done. Perhaps given the complete freedom to choose, you would do it differently or perhaps not at all. Think: What are the reasons why you would prefer to change the way you do this? What would you gain or lose by choosing to follow your own heart in this matter?

2. Journal: Write a journal entry which includes a brief description of the activity/custom you have chosen but then moves on to analyze these questions: Why do you think most of us, most often, follow along with customs and traditions? What tensions are created by following the crowd? By not following the crowd? What are the pros and cons of finding your own way in life?

*adapted from Janet Burne

Lesson Four: From Theory to Practice, Thoreau at Walden (1 class period)

Abstract: After considering Emerson's "Self-Reliance," we will transition to the application of these transcendental principles in Thoreau's Walden experiment. Students will have just considered a custom/tradition they follow simply because that's the way it has always been done which serves as a nice transition to Thoreau's musings in Walden.

Goals:

- Students will discuss in small groups their customs/traditions
- Students will understand Thoreau's reasons for going to the woods and his Walden experiment
- Students will read and discuss the opening of Walden
- Students will be able to identify his tone and intended audience

Procedure:

1. Students will read and share their Thoreau exercise #1 journals in small groups.
2. Class Discussion: What types of customs/traditions came up? What feelings did you have when considering breaking it? How did this activity help you understand Thoreau?
3. Thoreau PowerPoint: Living Deliberately. This PowerPoint will take a look at Thoreau, the man and the transcendentalist. I will explain his reasons for going to the woods (his brother John's death, Emerson's land, etc.), what he hoped to accomplish there, and the persona he takes on in the writing of Walden which boils down 2 year, 2 month, 2 day stay into a one-year text.
4. Close reading of the opening to "Walden." I will distribute copies of the opening to "Walden." I will read it out loud to the class as they annotate for the following ideas:
 - a. What's his tone? What words/phrases/statements lead you to this tone? Why would he use it?
 - b. Who is his audience? Are you part of his target audience? If we are part of his audience, what are we supposed to do? If we aren't, how do we read this text?

Assessment:

- I will collect the Thoreau exercises and grade them as a writing assignment for depth of thought and analysis of their custom/traditions in general.
- The next day in class, I will give a pop reading quiz on background information for Thoreau and transcendentalism. Students may use the notes they took from the PowerPoint.

HW: Read excerpts from "Walden" (these will include excerpts from "Where I Lived and What I Lived For," "Solitude," and "Conclusion") and answer the guiding discussion questions.

Lesson Six: Nature Walk to Cabot Woods (1 class period)

Abstract: While students are theoretically keeping String Journals and visiting an outdoor space once a week, I still want to reserve a class period to walk to nearby Cabot Woods and give students 30 minutes of solitude outside. After we have discussed Thoreau and his two year, two month, two day experiment, the class will therefore take a 10-minute walk to a nearby wooded area where they will feel the Walden experiment on a very small scale. Prior to this day in class, students will have prepared for this Thoreau Exercise #2 (Nature Walk) in this way: Wear the appropriate clothes for our walk to Cabot Woods. Preparation to write: How much time do you usually spend alone in Nature? What do you usually do when outside in Nature? How often are you really alone without any company, technology, or conversation? What is your relationship with solitude?

Goals:

- Students will experience silence and solitude on their way to and time in a natural environment
- Students will reflect in journal writing on their time outside and note their physical observations as well as their emotional observations of the time spent outdoors
- Students will be able to use this mini nature walk to better understand Thoreau's ideas of solitude in nature

Procedure:

1. As a class, we will walk to nearby Cabot Woods. Once we leave the school building, students should use this time for silent, individual reflection. I mean it! No talking/cell phones/music/etc. Just walking, looking and experiencing. Students will bring nothing with them.
2. Once we get to the park, students may disperse (I should still be able to see them), but they must be at least a few body lengths from anyone else. Embrace the solitude.
3. When we return to class, students will begin to silently reflect upon your experience. They may write and draw if they are so inspired.
 - What did you think about?
 - What did you see? Smell? Feel? Hear?
 - What did you notice about the class as we were walking to the woods? Once we got there? (Oftentimes, students will notice that we kept to the sidewalk in straight lines but dispersed once we got to the woods; this is a microcosm of the idea of social conformity v. freedom in the "wild" that we will see in our texts)

HW: Thoreau Exercise #2 Journal: Reflect on your experience with the Nature walk in today's class, conveying what you thought about, what you saw, smelled, felt, heard. Were you able to embrace the solitude? Or was it a challenge? Did changing our location of class change your thoughts? Or did those same thoughts follow you out to Nature?

How did our mini-experiment (as you thought about it, did it, and reflected on it) help you understand Thoreau?

Lesson Seven: Nature Poems (1 class period)

Abstract: To see that poets of the time also wrote of transcendental ideas, students will read “The World is Too Much With Us” and “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer.” Both speakers are calling for a return to nature and direct experience, for those lead to a stronger sense of identity and understanding. Again, we will see our protagonists have a stronger sense of self when they step away from society’s boundaries and into the “wild.”

This lesson serves, too, as a segue to the next portion of unit which focuses on transcendentalism in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

Goals:

- Students will read and analyze a poem for transcendental connections
- Students will observe how poetic choices (line breaks, structure, imagery) helps to convey theme
- Students will participate in a small group Socratic seminar discussing the poem and drawing connections to the ideas of Emerson and Thoreau

Procedure

1. I will distribute copies of Wordsworth’s “The World is Too Much With Us” to half of the class; the other half of the class will receive Whitman’s “I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”
2. The class will have time to read, understand, question, and annotate the poem for its message, transcendental ideas, and structural choices.
3. In two separate rounds, small groups will discuss their poems. This will be a Socratic seminar format, so I will be off to the side taking notes and only participating in order to get students to reconsider a point or to steer them in a different direction. As the inner group discusses, the outer group will be taking notes on one person’s participation in the inner circle using the rubric attached.

HW: Read background about Emily Dickinson on emilydickinsonmuseum.org. They should read the sections labeled “Her Childhood and Youth,” “The Writing Years” and “The Later Years.” Students will come in with notes taken on these sections and any other interesting pieces of information they gathered.

Assessment:

- Students will receive a participation grade for the Socratic seminar. I take notes on the students’ discussion and afterwards assign a grade based on my observations and their peer’s observations using the rubric attached.
- I will also collect the Thoreau Exercise #2 journal and again grade as a writing assignment for depth of thought and analysis of solitude and nature.

Socratic Seminar: Participant Rubric

Directions: Write the name of the peer you have been assigned to assess on the line below. Listen to the Socratic Seminar discussion and make notes and annotations. Assign your peer the earned grade based upon his/her level of participation.

Peer Evaluated: _____

Level	Criteria	Notes/Tallies
A Level Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Participant offers enough solid analysis, without prompting, to move the conversation forward. ✓ Participant, through his or her comments, demonstrates a deep knowledge of the text and the question. ✓ Participant has come to the seminar prepared, with notes and a marked/annotated text. ✓ Participant, through his or her comments, shows that s/he is actively listening to other participants. ✓ S/he offers clarification and/or follow-up that extends the conversation. ✓ Participant's remarks often refer back to specific parts of the text. 	
B Level Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Participant offers solid analysis without prompting. ✓ Through his or her comments, participant demonstrates a good knowledge of the text and the question. ✓ Participant has come to the seminar prepared, with notes and a marked/annotated text. ✓ Participant shows that s/he is actively listening to others. S/he offers clarification and/or follow-up. 	
C Level Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Participant offers some analysis, but may need prompting. ✓ Through his or her comments, participant demonstrates a general knowledge of the text and question. ✓ Participant is less prepared, with few notes and no marked/annotated text. ✓ Participant is actively listening to 	

	<p>others, but does not offer clarification and/or follow-up to others' comments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Participant relies more upon his or her opinion, and less on the text to drive his or her comments. 	
D or F Level Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Participant offers little commentary. ✓ Participant comes to the seminar ill-prepared with little understanding of the text and question. ✓ Participant does not listen to others, offers no commentary to further the discussion. 	

Lesson Eight: Introduction to Emily Dickinson, a Female Transcendentalist (2-3 days)

Abstract: A nonconformist in her life and in her writing, Emily Dickinson is an interesting parallel to Emerson and Thoreau, using her poetry much as they did their prose to reflect on her identity and life in the very conservative Amherst society. Through her letters and her poetry, Dickinson reveals her struggle with her sense of self, particularly her relationship with the church, which she never joined, despite the intense societal pressure to do so. She finds great solace in Nature and solitude, often the subject of her poetry. While she eventually removed herself from society completely, she was by no means unaware of what was occurring in her society. She read voraciously and kept up with the news in Amherst and beyond. As a class, I want us to consider her poetry through the lens of transcendentalism.

Goals:

- Students will be able to understand some of the biographical information on Emily Dickinson
- Students will be able to see that her life and poetic choices reflect transcendental ideals
- Students will make direct connections between her poetry and passages from Emerson and Thoreau

Procedure:

1. Discuss highlights of background information on Emily Dickinson.
2. As a class, we will read and discuss together “I am Nobody,” using this poem to connect to transcendental ideas of identity, individuality, private v. public self that we had previously studied in Emerson and Thoreau.
3. In small groups of 3-4, students will receive one Dickinson poem. The poems I’ve selected include “Some Keep the Sabbath,” “The World is Not Conclusion,” “There is a Solitude of Space,” “I’m ceded-I’ve stopped being theirs,” “The brain is wider than the sky.” As a group, students will:
 - a. read the poem and paraphrase its meaning
 - b. connect the poem to ideas present in Emerson and Thoreau
 - c. note stylistic elements that contribute to the poem’s meaning
 - d. create a Graphic Map that visually expresses Emerson’s, Thoreau’s, and Emily Dickson’s attitude towards the theme expressed in her poem (i.e. Nature as the place to encounter God) through a unified set of symbols.
4. Group Presentations. Students will present their graphic maps. Each student will turn in a 1.5-2 page typed explanation of their graphic map and the choices the group made.

Assessment:

- Groups will receive one grade for the Graphic Map based on a scale of 0-4:
 - 4: Symbol or related set of symbols chosen makes a unified statement, effectively synthesizing and organizing many details from divergent sources. It uncovers thought-provoking and insightful meanings that are hidden at first glance. Quotations and/or direct references to the text are significant and worthy of attention. The lines, words, and color are used with intent (including the lack thereof). The graphic is neat and professional looking.
 - 3: Symbol(s) chosen make(s) a unified statement, which synthesizes and organizes many details from divergent sources. The graphic connects to an underlying meaning of the work. Quotations and/or references to the text are worthy of attention. Not all lines, words, or color is used with intent. The graphic is neat and professional looking.
 - 2: Symbol or related set of symbols do not make a unifying statement, failing to synthesize or organize details from divergent sources. The graphic is merely a re-creation of literal events from the text. Quotations and/or direct references to the text may be obvious or not relevant to the task. Not all lines, words, or color are used with intent. The graphic is rushed or casually done, and/or not professional looking.
 - 1: Symbol(s) chosen is (are) irrelevant or not in fact a symbol. The graphic fails to suggest any hidden or underlying meaning of the text. Lines, words, and color are presented haphazardly and without intent, and the overall product is rushed and messy. Directions were not followed.
- Each student will also receive a writing grade for their individual reflection on the graphic map.

Little Picture Big Picture Reflection

Little Picture: Your Graphic Map

After completing the map, write a 1 ½ - 2 page response (each group member will do this individually) explaining how it conveys your understanding of the transcendentalist concept you linked between the Dickinson poem and Emerson and Thoreau. You should both explain elements of the map – choices of color, images, quotes, words, etc. – and how these elements convey the transcendental idea. Here are some questions to get you started:

- What similarities did you find between the writings of Dickinson, Emerson, and Thoreau? Where did you see patterns emerge in terms of their beliefs about identity, individuality, Nature, and other transcendentalist ideals?
- How did you choose to depict those similarities using images, color and lines? Be sure you explain each element of your map and the thinking that went into it by the group.
- How do your chosen quotes relate to your graphic map? Remember the quotes should help pull together the graphic elements and the underlying themes of the essays.

Lesson Nine: Transcendentalism Today (1 class period)

Abstract: I want students to realize that despite the fact that transcendentalism was a movement in the 19th century, many of the ideas still resonant today, in some cases and perhaps are even more appealing so as we get more and more distracted by technology and our fast-paced lifestyles. This is especially apparent in music in which they are themes of individuality and non-conformity. I want my students to be able to see connections between the ideas of Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickinson with our modern writers of music, realizing that what Emerson and Thoreau were concerned with is still articulated all around us.

Goals:

- Students will be able to identify a song that has transcendental themes
- Students will annotate the song lyrics for connections to ideas from Emerson, Thoreau and Dickinson
- Students will be able to verbally articulate the connections made in an informal presentation

Procedure:

1. Students will come in with the lyrics of a song they believe adheres to some or all of the transcendental ideas studied in this unit.
2. Their song lyrics should be carefully annotated for connections they see.
3. We will start class by listening to a handful of songs with the lyrics under the document camera. The student will then explain the connections he/she saw between the song and transcendentalism.

Assessment:

- Students will receive a homework completion grade for having printed lyrics in class that day and for their annotations for transcendental connections.

Lesson Ten: Being True Personal Essay

Abstract: Again, I want students to realize that the tenets of transcendentalism are not just ideas; Thoreau lived them out, and it is possible to do so in our society today. Students will therefore think about someone they know/know of who stands true to him/herself in the face of society's expectations and pressure. I have done this essay in the past and it is some of the best writing I receive from the students. It is also an opportunity to get to know them and someone important to them.

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Junior I

"Being True" Essay

If I am not I, who will be? –Thoreau, Journal 1841

As we saw in our study of Emerson and Thoreau, transcendentalists wholeheartedly believe that the most happy and fulfilling life is one in which a person is true to him/herself. That internal, original sense of truth is captured in Emerson's statement that "to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men – that is genius" or again, "It is easy to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."

Write an essay in which you use "Self-Reliance," "Walden," and person you know OR know of (can be a historical or literary character if you truly cannot find someone in your own life) to define and analyze what it means to be true to oneself. Use this person's life to then consider your own path.

Requirements: Please make sure your essay does the following:

- Takes 3-4 pages
- Quotes from *SR* and *Walden*
 - Introduction in which you define what it means to be true to oneself using Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickinson. Towards the end of your introduction, you should transition to your chosen subject.
 - First paragraph about the context and situation of the person you know who was challenged to be true to him/herself
 - Second paragraph: The person's decision to stay true to him/herself and perhaps the fallout of that decision.
 - Third paragraph: How does this person make you think differently about your life choices? What path are you struggling to follow? What would be your authentic life? What obstacles get in the way of that? How does your chosen subject inspire you to overcome any obstacles you may face in trying to pursue this authentic life?
 - Conclusion: Return to the idea of Being True in today's society. Is it possible?
- Follows MLA format
- Organizes itself clearly by its argument
- Contains well-organized paragraphs
- Uses complete, grammatically sound, and stylistically clear sentences

English 11-*Being True* Peer Edit

Please make all comments and observations ON the writer's draft.

Introduction and Thesis Statement

- Does the writer hook you in with the opening sentences?
- Does the writer use Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickinson to define what it means to be true to oneself?
- Is there a transition to the writer's chosen subject?

Evaluation of Discussion

- Evaluate the discussion. What does it do well? What needs to be improved?
- What point or idea does the essay explore and discuss particularly well? Be specific in your feedback so that the writer can work to emulate this throughout the paper.
- Identify 1-2 points or ideas that still need work. What suggestions can you provide to help the writer strengthen these points or ideas?

Essay Structure

- Does the writer follow the correct structure for the paper – introduction, background and context of chosen subject, narrative and analysis of subject, self-reflection, and conclusion?
- If not, which section needs attention and why?

Conclusion

- Does the conclusion bring together the chosen subject around the idea of being true?
- How effective is the “so what?” in the conclusion? How could it be improved?

Grammar and Mechanics

- As you read, make corrections for grammar, punctuation, and mechanics if you are sure of the correction.

Lesson Eleven: *Into The Wild* Viewing (2-3 days)

Abstract: At the end of our transcendental unit, students will watch *Into the Wild* with the understanding that what happened to Chris McCandless would not have happened to Thoreau (as Jeff Cramer made clear). But, at the very least, it shows a man trying to follow his heart, his journey away from society, and his eventual realization that “happiness is greater when shared.”

Goals:

- Students will be able to see the influence of Thoreau on a modern audience, i.e. Chris McCandless
- Students will consider how directorial decisions influence a story being told onscreen
- Students will take particular note of McCandless’ thoughts, actions, and feelings in different places in the novel—in mainstream society, in marginalized communities, and alone in the “wild”
- Students will construct an in-class essay in which they consider how Chris McCandless lived out the transcendentalist principles and how he did not

Procedure:

1. Show students the film in class while they take notes using the attached directed viewing guide.
2. The day following completion of the film and short discussion, students will respond to an in-class writing prompt: To what extent was McCandless Thoreauvian in his pursuits?

Assessment:

- I will grade these in-class essays according to the analytical essay rubric attached
- Students will also turn in their movie notes with their essay; these movie notes will be a separate homework grade and receive a $\checkmark+$, a \checkmark , or a $\checkmark-$

Into the Wild Viewing Guide

Directions: The following questions will direct your viewing of *Into the Wild* directed by Sean Penn. While watching the film, take notes that will help you answer these questions with well-developed responses that include **concrete references** (quotes, too!) to the film. We will be discussing each of the points prior to the culminating writing assignment based on your careful study of this film.

Before you watch the film, read the following:

1. As you watch *Into the Wild*, note the atmosphere of the film. What mood does the director create in the opening sequence? During various important sequences? In the parting sequence? What are some of the filmmaking techniques the director uses to convey this mood (e.g. camera angles, lighting, music, editing, camera movement, etc.)?
2. What key elements are featured in this film? Are there key symbols or images highlighted in the film? Are any of them associated with each of the main characters?
3. What are your initial reactions to/impressions of Chris McCandless? Note if your impression changes and why/why not over the course of the film.

During the film, jot down extensive notes on the following:

1. Use the graphic organizer on the back, note (1) Chris' thoughts and feelings and general attitude (2) the events that occur AND (3) the nature of his interactions with people/things when he is in:

1. Mainstream society
2. Marginalized communities
3. the "wild"

2. Note moments where Thoreau and his writings are referenced? What parts of Thoreau's writing are quoted? What is Chris doing or deciding to do at that moment? What is the influence of Thoreau on that part of Chris' journey?

After you have viewed the film, consider the following:

1. Return to the preview questions, reflect on them, and be ready to discuss them with the class.
2. Discuss the director's use of setting. How does it impact the theme of the story?

3. What scenes/images still remain in your memory?
4. Is there anything about the film that you would have done differently if you were the director?
5. What is your overall assessment of this film? What are its strengths? Its weaknesses?

Analytical Essay Rubric

Name: _____

	Exceeds Standards (A)	Meets Standards (B)	Approaching Standards (C)	Falls below Standards (D)
Thesis and Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction draws the reader in. • Introduction builds up to the thesis statement with interesting and relevant ideas and/or images. • Complex and original thesis statement. • Thesis includes very strong reasons and/or evidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction sets up thesis statement with relevant ideas, images and/or information. • Thesis statement makes an interpretive leap • Thesis statement includes the topic and the writer's interpretation of the topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction includes information and/or ideas related to the thesis. • Parts of the intro may seem unrelated to the thesis. • Thesis is clear, specific and focuses on one main idea. • Thesis is more than facts and takes a definite side. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction primarily contains information and ideas that are irrelevant to the topic of the essay. • Introduction does not yet clearly state thesis • Thesis restates facts in novel; cannot be convincingly debated against.
Depth of evidence and commentary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses thoughtful, original selection of evidence/quotes • Introduces and explains the significance of all evidence, <u>including the author's use of language</u> in detailed, perceptive commentary that extends beyond what we discussed in class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce s and explains all quotes. • Quotes are sometime s paraphras ed rather than analyzed. • At least 2/3 of every analytical paragraph h is analysis (not plot summary or quotes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses some good evidence/quotes but may rely heavily on paraphrasing. • Does not explain significance of some evidence/quotes completely • Quotations may not clearly support the thesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not yet have enough evidence to support thesis • Does not yet adequately introduce or explain most pieces of evidence • Relies on plot summary • Does not yet show comprehensi on of language of the novel
Coherence and organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose sharply defined throughout essay • Each 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose is clear throughout essay • Each 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose is not always evident throughout essay. • The main idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of essay is not yet clear • Many ideas are not

	<p>paragraph states a complex main idea that is linked to thesis of the essay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paragraphs are presented in a sequence that strongly supports the thesis • Conclusion extends ideas with a new twist or question 	<p>paragraph has a topic sentence linked to thesis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paragraphs follow a logical sequence and each links to thesis • Conclusion restates and supports thesis 	<p>of some paragraphs is unclear/vague</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paragraphs are in a logical sequence but some do not clearly link to the thesis • If present, conclusion does not yet reflect content of the essay and support thesis 	<p>sufficiently developed or clearly linked to the thesis of the essay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disjointed and illogical paragraph sequence • Conclusion is not present
Language and style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary, sentence structure, and style engage the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear vocabulary allows reader to follow essay clearly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some sentences or word choice confuse or mislead reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusing sentences or word choice do not allow reader to understand essay
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No spelling or grammar errors • Correct quote notation • Follows MLA format 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few minor errors in spelling or usage • Follows MLA format with one error 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some significant errors in spelling or usage • Several errors in MLA format 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerous errors distract reader • Inconsistent or nonexistent MLA format

Comments:

Bibliography

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