

Nancy Slator

Transcendentalism: Your place in the world

Teaching decision-making and internal locus of control

Grade 10-12 Substantially Separate English class

A note to the evaluator: I teach at-risk students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, attention deficit disorder, and/or mild cognitive disabilities. The lesson many of them have learned from their disabilities is that effort does not pay off. If they work harder than everyone else, they will still have less success. They have learned to have an *external locus of control*, believing that their lives are controlled by outside forces.

I finessed the lesson assignment somewhat because in studying Thoreau I thought I could see great lessons for my students in taking control of their lives and being responsible for their outcomes. A Sense of Place, however, is a difficult topic because many of my students are foster children. There could be many useful lessons about place for them, but I think I would need to consult with an adjustment counselor to write an appropriate unit.

Some students in these circumstances continue to work hard and succeed to the best of their abilities, but those tend not to be in my class. The students I have could be making better use of tools they do have, especially now that they are old enough to take control of their own lives. The purpose of these lessons is to use the philosophy of Transcendentalism to teach these students

their own value and potential and to encourage them to thoughtfully make and take responsibility for their academic choices. These students are at risk of dropping out – a process that almost never involves a firm decision and plan but usually starts with ever-more-frequent absences that eventually put the student so far behind that they feel the “have to” drop out.

The general plan is to have a series of lessons based on quotations from Transcendentalist writing, with activities and student responses for each. There are a variety of factors arguing against expecting these students to complete work outside class, so the “homework” must be engaging and active and not involve independent reading. The pre- and post-test will not be about knowledge of transcendentalism but rather about locus of control.

I am specifically planning this for a substantially separate English class of about five students in Grades 10-12 that will meet every other day for 84 minutes all year long. I may adapt it later for a Grade 11 inclusion class.

The Understanding by Design unit plan template is required by my school.

Stage 1 Desired Results

<p>ESTABLISHED GOALS</p>	<p align="center"><i>Transfer</i></p>	
<p>R.CCR.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</p>	<p><i>Students will be able to independently use their learning to...</i></p> <p>consider the long-term results of immediate decisions</p>	
<p>RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.</p> <p>RI.11-12.6. Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.</p>	<p align="center"><i>Meaning</i></p>	
	<p>UNDERSTANDINGS</p> <p><i>Students will understand that...</i></p> <p>they affect their success through their own actions</p>	<p>ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS</p> <p>Who sets your goals?</p> <p>What causes success?</p> <p>What does it mean to be self-reliant?</p>
<p>W.11-12.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p> <p>W.11-12.5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.</p>	<p align="center"><i>Acquisition</i></p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Students will know...</i> • internal vs. external locus of control • the Transcendentalists' view of self-reliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Students will be skilled at...</i> • setting goals • making a plan to achieve goals • identifying the consequences of following through nor not

Stage 2 - Evidence

Evaluative Criteria	Assessment Evidence
Students can identify a dilemma in their own life and predict the results of several courses of action.	PERFORMANCE TASK(S): Students will read selections from Transcendentalist writing and identify the author's key points. Students will apply the philosophy of Transcendentalism to a self-identified personal choice and devise a reasonable plan for achieving the desired outcome.
Students can identify major features of Transcendentalist thought.	OTHER EVIDENCE: Students will improve their scores on a measure of Locus of Control based on http://www.psych.uncc.edu/pagoolka/LC.html . (The reading level will need to be adjusted and different versions created for a pre- and post-test.)

Stage 3 – Learning Plan

Day One

Administer Locus of Control evaluation tool.

Give students a pre-made journal that includes the daily quotes and room to answer the close reading questions.

Theme one: you make choices:

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

Put the quotation on the overhead. Close reading of the quote.

Daily Close Reading Questions

1. What vocabulary is not clear? (Students will be given definitions.)
2. What is the author's main point?
3. How would you say this, if you were trying to make the same point to a friend?
4. What is one thing that is special about the way the author phrased this idea?
5. Is it true?

Discuss the questions before asking students to answer them in their journals. Allow sufficient think time. Ask students to raise a hand when when they have a guess, but wait until more than one hand is up.

Do a brief lesson in how to make a flow chart for an everyday decision. Discuss decisions a person makes without even realizing it's a decision.

Homework assignment: Make a list of 10 decisions made between now and our next class.

Day Two

Share homework writing.

In class, pick one commonplace decision and make a flow chart of it. Do it on a transparency and present it to the class on the overhead.

Pick a personal non-controversial either-or decision (like what to have for lunch or what to wear). Make a flow chart of the decision-making process on a transparency.

Homework assignment: Make a list of 10 things that other people require you to do.

Day Three

Theme two: You are the boss of you

Present yesterday's flow chart and share last night's homework list.

You will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world 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. Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

Close reading of the quote. Same questions as Day 1.

Make a list of the rules we live by: laws, school policies, unwritten rules. Which of these rules are often ignored?

Laws: speed limit, drinking age, marijuana laws, no drunk driving

School rules: no texting during class in the hallway, no gum, no food

Unwritten rules: girls dress girly, boys don't cry, girls don't play football

Make a chart on the board with "laws/rules/unwritten rules" down the side and "name it/consequences" across the top. Have students copy the chart into their notebooks.

Discuss: What are the consequences for breaking these rules? Potential and what you've actually seen happen, worst case. (For example, drunk driving injuries, bullying)

Role play: have each student think of a moral dilemma a student might actually face. Present it to one student and have them respond. Present the dilemma to another student and ask them to respond in the opposite way to the first student.

Discuss: What is the thought process that goes in to making the decision to break a rule?

Take the point of view of someone who is breaking the rule. (It could be a rule you've actually broken, but don't use names.) Make a flow chart.

Homework assignment: make a list of 10 things in your life you can't control.

Day Four

Share yesterday's flow chart and last night's homework writing.

Theme three: You're on your own

There are old heads in the world who cannot help me by their example or advice to live worthily and satisfactorily to myself; but I believe it is in my power to elevate myself this very hour above the common level of my life. It is better to have your head in the clouds and know where you are, if indeed you cannot get it above them, than to breathe the clearer atmosphere below them, and think that you are in paradise. Thoreau, "Correspondence"

Close reading of the quote. Same questions as Day 1.

Each student takes a marker and writes on the board: at least 10 things you could do to make your own life easier, less stressful, more fun, more productive – whatever values are important to you. You could also write the way someone you know could make their life different in a good way. Share ideas, copy off each other. We want a board full of things to think about. We will take a picture of it when it's done.

Homework assignment: come to class ready to spend some time outside, so be dressed for it and bring bug spray if you want it.

Day Five

To the woods with a notebook. You must stay within sight of the teacher. Find a spot where you could talk quietly to yourself and no one could hear you. Sit so you don't see anyone else. Write about the woods. Free write if you want (woods-related) but spend at least some time looking for patterns and order in the forest. Look for things that are the same. Look for ways that things in the woods take care of themselves.

Homework assignment: What are three important ways you take care of yourself, that no one else can do for you? (Don't think about eating and wearing clothes. Try to think of things that are specific to you. Also please make it school-appropriate.)

Day Six

Share yesterday's work and last night's homework writing.

Theme four: Making good choices

You say that you do not succeed much. Does it concern you enough that you do not? Do you work hard enough at it? Do you get the benefit of discipline out of it? If so, persevere. Thoreau, "Correspondence"

Close reading of the quote. Same questions as Day 1.

As a class, decide on a serious life dilemma that requires careful decision-making. As a class, do a flow chart on the overhead. What are the best and worst outcomes of this dilemma?

Homework assignment: make a list of five people you admire and don't admire. Names not required. List one reason for your classification of each.

Day Seven

Share last night's homework writing

Essay: imagine that someone four or five years younger than you has asked for your help in solving a problem. What problem might that be? What advice might you give that younger person?

Theme five: Choosing your goals

How we shall earn our bread is a grave question; yet it is a sweet and inviting question. Let us not shirk it, as is usually done. It is the most important and practical question which is put to man. Let us no answer it hastily. ... A very little bread, – a very few crumbs are enough, if it be of the right quality, for it is infinitely nutritious. Thoreau, "Correspondence"

Pursue, keep up with, circle round and round your life, as a dog does his master's chaise. Do what you love. Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw at it still. Thoreau, "Correspondence"

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things. Thoreau, *Walden*

Make a worksheet grid with the left column being five lines labeled "\$/family/education/free time/job" and three blank columns labeled across the top "low/medium/high." Have students decide what's the least amount of money they could live on, what would be comfortable, and what would be "rich." What is the worst job they could actually be happy at, what's a job that would make them happy enough, and what is their dream job. Etc. Fill in all squares of the grid.

If "low" is one point, "medium" is three, and "high" is five, and you have 15 points to use, what choices would you make? (For instance if you want the maximum amount of money, that costs five points, and you're going to have to balance that off by choosing the lowest amount of something else, like free time.)

Homework assignment: Ask five people what their greatest goal in life is. (Be ready to give them some thinking time!)

Day Eight

Share yesterday's chart and last night's survey results

Theme six: Making a plan and following through – living deliberately

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. Thoreau, *Walden*

Pick one goal that you can accomplish in one year. On a separate sheet of paper, list 10 things that have to happen before that goal can be reached. Exchange your list with a classmate and see if the classmate can tell what your goal is. If not, talk to the classmate about how your list should be different to make it more clear where you want to head.

Make a poster of your goal and your steps to reach it. Follow the format "Set a goal, make a plan, follow through."

Day Nine

Write a short essay that answers the questions:

1. What kinds of things do people control in their lives?
2. What things are out of a person's own control?
3. If people are not happy with their lives, what can they personally do to improve them?

Administer locus of control evaluation tool post-test

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