

**LESSON PLANS FOR THOREAU AND TRANSCENDENTALISM**  
**By Katie Elsener**  
**Approaching Walden 2005**  
**Curriculum Unit**

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*The validity of Henry David Thoreau and transcendentalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the 19<sup>th</sup> century man still speaks to us today.*

**Goals:**

Students will be able to relate to the wisdom of Henry David Thoreau and be able to apply such wisdom to their lives. Students will be able to think and hopefully live a little more deliberately after exploring and applying Thoreau's philosophy. Students will find value in the place where they live.

**Objectives:**

- Students will learn about Thoreau, his life and his philosophy.
  
- Students will be able to transfer Thoreau's love and respect for nature and his place in the world to their own natural surroundings and place in their world.
  
- Students will sharpen their observation skills.
  
- Students will sharpen their writing skills through several journalings, poetry and/or narrative recordings. They will organize their writings into a personal nature portfolio.
  
- Students will learn how to use a digital camera to support their written words.

**Day one:**

Assign *Walden* excerpt, *Civil Disobedience* excerpt, *Battle of the Ants* and short biography of Henry David Thoreau from my American literature anthology, *The American Experience*, Prentice Hall.

Students will be making a portfolio at the end of this unit which will include their writings, digital photography and/or original drawings. They should start to think about documenting their experiences with nature using the camera or drawings.

**Day two:**

Show the class the digital slide show I made for this unit which includes Thoreau, Emerson, Walden Pond and Concord locations relevant to the authors and transcendentalism. Describe all the places represented as they watch the slides.

Discuss the readings for today. How does Thoreau speak to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What are some of your favorite quotes from these readings?

Journaling: What is autumn to you? Think about shapes, colors, and the feel of fall. Think about seasonal celebrations like football games, the World Series, Halloween, Thanksgiving, hay-rack rides, etc.

Discuss the journals. Try to get the students to observe and appreciate the beauty of the nature around them. The discussion will focus on the local beauty to be found in our place. This focus will include local neighborhoods, parks, our city and state. Our sense of place will be stressed.

Students will take some notes on Henry David Thoreau.

**Assignment:**

Pick your special place in nature. This could be your backyard, the neighborhood park, a lake or pond, river, a farm, a grove of trees, a meadow, etc. It is a place you like spending time at in order to enjoy nature and the outdoors. You are going to make a map of this place and note special experiences and/or thoughts you have had there. Note those experiences directly onto the map. Then, write a short journal entry describing those experiences. How did they affect you? How are the experiences unique for you? What makes this place special to you? Have at least five items on your map that are based upon your experiences. This assignment will be included in your nature portfolio.

**Day three:**

Transcendentalism: Discuss the movement and its participants. Give some notes and ask for feedback from the class.

Journaling: Thoreau went to the woods to live deliberately. What would you like about living in Thoreau's cabin for two years, two months and two days? What would you dislike about living in Henry's cabin? What would Henry like and dislike about living in your home?

Our discussion will be based upon the journals.

**Assignment:**

Give students a copy of all of the quotes that are found on Brister's Hill. They need to choose three quotes and journal about them. This is due tomorrow.

**Day four:**

Discuss journals that were completed for homework.

More journaling is necessary in order to find connections to transcendentalism.

--who can we call heroes today? Who would you like to emulate? Why did you choose that person?

--in your opinion, what is conscience?

Discussion is based on the journals. Henry David said that conscious is God speaking to us. We discuss his interpretation of conscience.

### **Day five:**

This is a field trip day. We go to a wilderness park for two hours. Each group has one digital camera to record photos of nature and their group findings.

The class is divided into three groups.

- Group one observes animals, clues and signs of their presence. They make a list of everything they find and use their digital camera.
- Group two observes plants and makes a list of everything they find and use their digital camera. They need to name as many of the plants as possible.
- Group three observes evidence of people and they make a list of everything they find and use their digital camera.

Each group writes up a single journal based on their observations and experiences while observing. They also need to review their photos.

The groups come together and compare findings. How do animals, plants and humans affect each other in this wilderness park? What are the positive and negative effects of each group? What can we do to ensure that there are more positive than negative effects?

### **Assignment:**

Bring all writings and photos to class tomorrow. This includes the nature mapping exercise.

### **Day six:**

Journaling: Henry David Thoreau loved nature and his little town of Concord, Massachusetts. Has learning about Thoreau helped you to better appreciate nature and your town of Lincoln, Nebraska? Explain and be specific.

Gather and organize all your nature writings, photos and/or original drawings. From your writings create a poem or personal narrative about nature to go into your portfolio.

Organize your personal nature portfolio. This will include all of your journals, your mapping, a poem and/or narrative, photos and/ or original drawings and anything else you consider valuable in the context of this unit. It is due one week from today.

Encourage the students to continue with their nature journals so that they end up with a four-seasons portfolio. Writing is discovery and they are discovering themselves and their place in their world.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL  
PTS. \_\_\_\_\_

### Rubric for your Thoreau Portfolio

Your portfolio will be neatly organized and easy to examine. Your final journals will be typed. Each journal entry is worth 30 points. Your map is worth 15 points, photos and/or original drawings or paintings are worth 30 points. The total value of the portfolio is 285 points.

Your journals are graded on the following points:

- Ideas—the heart of your message, the content of the piece, your main theme
- Voice—heart and soul, magic and wit, feeling and conviction are apparent
- Organization—the internal structure, the thread of central meaning
- Language—the rich, colorful, sensory and precise language that moves and enlightens
- Mechanics—grammar, spelling, punctuation, the tools of organization

#### 1. Journal #1—Autumn and You

Ideas	10 pts	_____
Voice	5 pts	_____
Organization	5 pts	_____
Language	5 pts	_____
Mechanics	5 pts	_____

#### 2. Map of your special place with notes

Organization	5 pts	_____
Complete notes	5 pts	_____
Artistry	5 pts	_____

#### 3. Journal #2---Your Special Nature Place

Ideas	10 pts	_____
Voice	5 pts	_____
Organization	5 pts	_____
Language	5 pts	_____

Mechanics 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Journal #3---You Live Henry's Life/Henry Lives Your Life**

Ideas 10 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Voice 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Organization 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Language 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Journal #4---Your Thoughts on Thoreau Quotes**

Ideas 10 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Voice 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Organization 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Language 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Journal #5---Transcendentalism Connections**

Ideas 10 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Voice 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Organization 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Language 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Journal #6---Group List and Journal from Field Trip**

Ideas 10 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Voice 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Organization 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Language 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Journal #7---Appreciation of Your Place in the World**

Ideas 10 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Voice 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Organization 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Language 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Photos and/or Original Drawings/Misc. Nature Items**

Quality of work 15 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Relevance of work 15 pts \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Final Writing—Culmination Nature Poem or Narrative**

Ideas 10 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Voice 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Organization 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Language 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics 5 pts \_\_\_\_\_