

Approaching Walden 2005

Course Title: Walking with Thoreau
Teacher: Richard Wallace
Souhegan High School, Amherst, NH
Grade Levels: 11 & 12

Goals: Students will produce a journal of keen observations about place, discoveries and insights about the connection we have with nature. Students will also collect research data in the journal. Without human reflection there is no sense of place.

Objectives:

- Students will explore the works and ideas of Henry D. Thoreau, Aldo Leopold and Terry T. Williams to embark on an interdisciplinary journey of active inquiry. This engages the student as worker and teacher as coach.
- Students will develop a strong sense of awareness, awareness Barry Lopez describes as the connection between the “interior and exterior landscape.”
- Students will make connections between literature, science, art and history through learning about their home place. Place being family, cultural and natural communities.

Unit Essential Question: What does it mean to live deliberately in the twenty first century?

Unit Abstract: This trimester-long course will allow students to learn about Thoreau’s ideas through visual, auditory and authentic learning experiences. Students will be reading, writing, walking, researching, discussing, cooking and sauntering; thoroughly immersed in activities Thoreau engaged in. Students will be “living life” through this course not just reading about. Students will be asked to make connections in their own lives to the ideas Thoreau espoused. Some of the questions addressed will be; “What have you learned about yourself in Thoreau’s readings? about values then and today? Students will learn about Thoreau’s fusion of the arts and sciences, which paved the way for, Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard, Mary Oliver and Barry Lopez. There will be one field trip to Walden Pond in Concord Ma. and numerous local “field trips”. Students will keep an extensive journal and complete a culminating project.

Grading System: The students and teacher will collaboratively develop a rubric for what a high quality journal should contain for this course.

Introduction: Students will receive background information on Thoreau through excerpts from “A Life of the Mind” by R. D. Richardson and the Thoreau Chronology by Leonard F. Klenfeld. They will also conduct more research on Thoreau dealing one aspect of his life that interests them such as, writer, surveyor, pencil maker etc.

Course Outline: The cornerstone for this course will be a journal where all student work will be recorded. Students will be given models of different types of journals. These will include Thoreau's Journals, Clare Leslie Walker and Hannah Hinchman's journal activities.

Journal Activity

Objective:

- To have students develop keen observation and classification skills
- To have students respond to observations in narrative style or poetry
- Produce a National History inventory of herbs, wildflowers and woody plants, at Souhegan High School.
- Develop a common book
- Develop sketching skills
- Make the connection between human and natural communities in their home place.

Activity One

- Students will be prepped with some basic journals skills before going out (Leslie, Hinchman, Thoreau, "blind" activities)
- Have students go outdoors (contact!) with journals and pencils to find and sketch 5 different wildflowers or woody shrubs. They will *not* take field guides with them.
- After sketching and describing the 5 specimen students will then look up in field journals to obtain the common and Latin name to record next to each sketch and description.
- Have students respond in prose or poetry to the time spent on observations

Some prompts are:

- Do these plants remind you of anything?
- What patterns repeat?
- How are these plants moved by the wind?
- What do they smell like?
- What kind of shadow does it cast?
- What were you curious about while outside?

Activity Two:

- Have students back away from a plant or plants and sketch the whole landscape
- Have students regroup and fill in a map of the study area at school locating their specific plants on the map.
- Have students draw in other natural features on the map, such as a river, field, and forest

Writing prompts:

- What is a healthy landscape? Consider human and ecological factors

Homework:

- Have students duplicate this activity at home. Students will regroup at school to locate all of the specimens found on topo maps of Amherst and Mount Vernon.

Activity Three:

- Have students complete one piece of art for one specimen, in color with and accompanying passage or a poem. These passages can be from the works of others or their own creations.

Activity Four:

Culminating activity:

- Students will collaboratively produce a class guide titled “Plants of Souhegan High School”
- Students will include all of their journaling skills in this new field guide
- Students will use the rubric they designed to produce a quality guide

Other Culminating Activities:

- After this class project, students will chose an essential question to explore. This course is designed on inquiry, curiosity and thoughtfulness. These are the fertile conditions required for these learning opportunities. Students may also develop an EQ of their own.

Essential Questions:

- Why should we study cities, towns or school as ecosystems?
- How is suburban sprawl changing your town?
- How can science, poetry and art help define what is wild?
- What are the biotic and abiotic factors that help shape your community?
- What are the symbols of inspiration in your town?
- How does story and fact ground us to a place?

State Standards

There are numerous State of New Hampshire standards that this course will address in English and Science. It will also address some in Art and Social Studies to a lesser degree. This course will also address all of the Learner Expectation for SHS, which are available at www.sprise.com/shs.

Reading List:

Thoreau, H. D., excerpts from Walden, The Journals, Wild Fruits, Civil Disobedience

Williams, Terry T., Clan of One Breasted Women

Moore, Kathleen Dean, Where Should I Live And What Should I Live For?

Myerson, Joel, Intro to Transcendentalism: A Reader

Hinchman, Hannah, excerpts, A Trail through Leaves

Leslie and Roth, excerpts, Keeping a Nature Journal

Kumin, Maxine, Menial Labor and The Muse

Leopold, Aldo, excerpts, A Sand County Almanac

Elder, John, excerpts, Reading the Mountain of Home

naturewriting.com

Bibliography:

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Thoreau Institute July 07, 2005.

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Harvard University Press, Cambridge Ma

Foster, Walter (1991) How to Draw and Paint
Walter Foster Publications, Languna Hills Ca

Hinchman, Hannah (1997) A Trail Through Leaves
W.W. Norton Company, NY. NY.

Kumin, Maxine Ed. Slovic and Dixon (1993) Being In The World
MacMillan Publishing Company, NY. NY.

Leslie and Roth (2000) Keeping a Nature Journal.
Storey Books, Pownal, Vt.

Moore, Kathleen Dean (2004) Where Should I Live and What Should I Live For?
ISLE vol. 11.1 Winter 2004, University of Nevada Press, Reno Nev.

Thoreau, H. D. (1995) Walden; Annotated and Ed. by Walter Harding
Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, NY.

Thoreau, H. D. (2000) Wild Fruits. Ed. by Brad Dean
W.W. Norton and Company NY. NY.

Thoreau, H. D. (1993) Civil Disobedience and Other Essays.
Dover Publishing Inc., Mineola, NY.

Thoreau, H. D. (1962) The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau
Vol. I – XIV 1837 – Oct, 1861, Dover Publishing, Inc.

Williams, Terry Tempest (1992) Refuge, An Unnatural History of Family and Place.
Vintage Books, NY. NY.