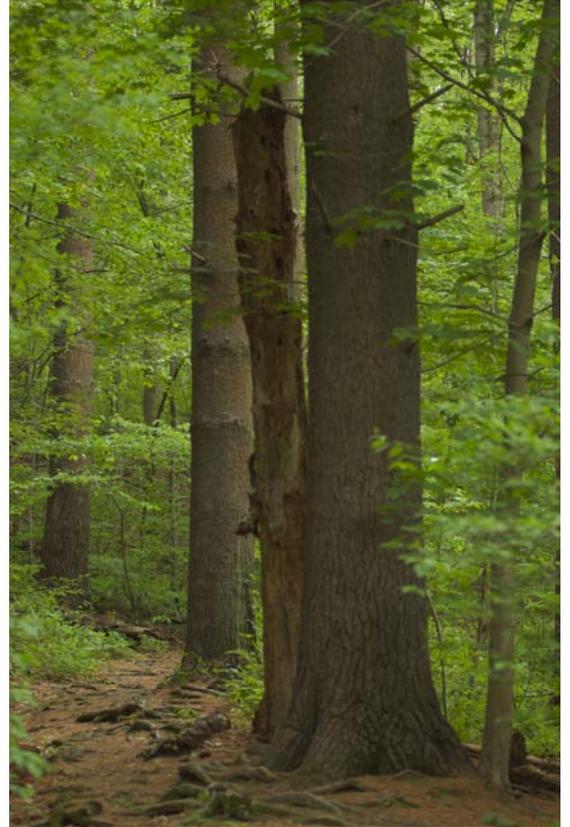


We Are All Connected (Todos Somos Conectados):

An international learning project based on conversations
about nature



Created by:

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Grade level: 9-10 (Spanish III or Spanish IV)

Subjects included: Spanish, Science (earth science or biology)

Optional subject included: English

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I. Abstract and Rationale

Todos Somos Conectados (We are all connected) is an on-going communication project that links the common interests and concerns of two different cultures. The common bond that the two cultures share is the necessity of the preservation of natural, local habitats. Students will find that some issues that they present to each other will be quite different and some will be very similar. Through the format of a nature newsletter, students will connect through the proposition of solutions, support for each other's conservation initiatives, and appreciation for each other's natural world. Many communities often overlook, neglect or remove natural habitats. Many communities may not think that they have habitats worth protecting or preserving. These wondrous spots, including river banks, local woods, and small ponds, can be not only quiet, pristine sanctuaries away from the paved world, but also natural science classrooms, the best hands-on learning available to modern educators.

As a teacher of foreign language and world culture, I believe that before students can care about international issues, they must first care about local issues, the ones that most directly affect them. In order to care about local issues, they must understand them. And, in order to understand local issues, we, as educators, must expose them to these issues. I will be the first to admit that I take for granted that someone or some organization preserves the natural areas I love so much. I haven't written to a legislator, visited city hall, or contacted a local environmental protection group to see how I can help. In examining my own reticence to action, I realized that I have never closely examined most of the natural places around me. This is where my project idea began.

I see them from a distance. I jog next to them with my eyes focused only on the black trail before me. I look at the sunset over the local river frequently and the flora appears green and full, and therefore, fine. The other day, as I was walking my dog along my jogging path, I actually turned my head to observe what was around me on each side. I realized there were thickets of man-sized reeds to my left and a huge, grassy plain to my right that tapered off into smaller reeds and grasses, and then gave way to the river. We veered off the path and into the grass and proceeded to the edge of the banks. I was curious to look in the water to see if I could detect fish. I passed a sign that said the riverbanks were part of a restoration project and that much had been done to support and revive the natural flora and fauna. I also read that the river houses several types of bass and freshwater eel, in addition to numerous bird species. My interest was piqued. But, as I looked into the dark water, I could see nothing but opaque, shale-colored ripples. I saw no fish. I looked up and down the banks as we walked more, and I saw the same type of litter that I see against urban highway dividers—plastic bottles, food wrappers, and scrap metal. Upon closer inspection, I realized that all was not well with this beautiful river park that I had only seen from a distance. I thought of the pure, protected forest and beach areas I have visited over the years, both local and international, and I realized why they were in such better condition. Enough people had cared about them to protect them. Enough people had gotten close enough to make these ecosystems of personal value to them. I didn't care about the river until I was there, until I got close enough to see it for myself.

I teach in a very well-manicured, mansion and estate-laden, suburban paradise about twenty minutes from a major city. I do not know where the wild is in my teaching community. I have seen some parks and trails as I drive by them, but have not taken the time to closely inspect. I wonder if my students visit these spots. I wonder if my students know what they're missing if they've never been to one. Have they been taught to look closely so that they can learn to appreciate?

Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* has challenged generations to get to know nature intimately, for it offers not only a superb scientific teaching tool, but also presents a unique opportunity to be still and reflect in a way that no other environment does. Today's students' lives are understandably packed with technology—they have, after all, grown up with it—and continually increasing demands for their academic future. I have often wondered if students know how to be still and quiet, and allow time for reflection and introspection. I can think of no greater way to give them this opportunity but to connect them to special spots in the natural world. *Walden* is the quintessential piece of literature to inspire this connection. Where is my community's Walden? Do we even have one? If not, how far do we have to look?

Walden has challenged so many to delve into the close details of a natural environment, but only because Thoreau did not keep his journal to himself. He shared the scientific and spiritual wealth of his journey so that others would know of him, perhaps to learn from him, perhaps to appreciate nature, or perhaps simply to assert his innate right to document a life-changing experience. Once we find our Waldens, we will share our discoveries with the world. Through the newsletter project that follows (which may be online or an actual newsletter), we will parallel our natural

journey with those in an amazing location (for my project, Ecuador or Costa Rica).

We, therefore, will learn from each other once we learn how to appreciate what we already have, and help begin to solve the environmental problems that we all face.

II. Duration and Objectives

This project is designed to produce and exchange one newsletter per quarter, for a total of four newsletters in an academic year.

Learning objectives:

- Commit to investigating, observing, and possibly adopting a natural area for one year
- Compare and contrast natural characteristics of a habitat in the home community with that of the exchange community
- Identify the cultural characteristics that influence the way the two countries approach conservation
- Detail the work of conservationists from their area
- Memorialize and exchange findings and close observations in one's natural habitat in a quarterly newsletter

III. Project Outline

Each newsletter will contain 6 segments. Important notes:

- With the help of a science teacher, the whole class may adopt a special place and exchange this information as one quarterly newsletter that uses information from the whole class (5 sections: 5 groups in the class so each group has a chance to experience each one of the duties and rotates responsibilities each marking period.). On the most basic level, the science teacher needs to simply lead the students to the adopted place once a quarter. S/he may get as involved as much as they want beyond that, adding insight or guiding the observations. Ideally, choose a science teacher who is already teaching local habitats in some way. If the whole

class can't go as a group, ask him/her to offer individual support for the students who are participating in the project.

- **Alternate:** If there is not science teacher to work with on this project, it can still be done as long as the other country can do individual or group emails. In this case, there would be more of a “blog” exchange between US and foreign students. The teacher can assign students to do personal research in this case.
- All newsletters are written in the native language of the *other* country. For US students, they will put their Spanish to the test when they get feedback from their Ecuadorian peers (to see if they effectively communicated). The Ecuadorian students will write in English. The only sections that may have to be written in English (due to scientific language or to yield more honest, in-depth answers) could be *Species Spotlight* and *Inspiration* (this probably will always be in the native language because it's a thought-provoking literary-inspired prompt. If this project were to take place in a Spanish IV class, I would make them write it all in Spanish because at that point, they are accelerated writers).

NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE:

A) SPECIES SPOTLIGHT:

- i. Detail a species of animal, bird, plant, or insect from the chosen habitat, with photograph or artistic rendering if possible. This can be an endangered species or simply an interesting species or one that is integral to the environment but often overlooked.
- ii. Students should discuss why this species is important to their local ecosystem (SCIENCE TEACHER OPPORTUNITY-MAY ENRICH THE PROJECT WITH GUIDED CLOSE OBSERVATION)

B) MY SPOT

- i. Choose carefully! Make sure this spot is something that is important to the class or the individual because it is a 1-year commitment.
- ii. Observe and journal for 30 minutes (if project is done with individual students) during each session.
- iii. Observe and journal as often as science teacher will allow if this is a class project (30 minute sessions). The more journal entries the students have, the better selection there will be to choose from for publication.

C) ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE:

- i. Articulate a local environmental issue affecting the chosen spot or the community in which they seek advice or strategies from the other country.
- ii. Examples:
 1. People litter in our local pond. How do we prevent this?
 2. Recycling is not taken very seriously in our school system

and our program needs a lot of work. Waste just gets thrown away. How do we encourage people to recycle in the school?

D) ENVIRONMENTALIST/ NATURALIST SPOTLIGHT:

- i. Interview a student, teacher, scientist or community member who has done something special to help protect the environment OR someone who has helped your chosen spot.
- ii. Create a profile of them (based on 5-10 questions).
- iii. Submit a photograph, if possible, to really make this exchange a personal connection!

E) INSPIRATION:

- i. React to a selection or quote from an inspirational source. In this project: H.D. Thoreau.
- ii. Challenge the other country to find their “Thoreau” or a conservationist pioneer for this assignment. (*Who are the World Wide Thoreau’s?*)
- iii. Teacher chooses five student journal entries to publish in each issue so that all students have a chance to have at least one of their entries published throughout the year. (ENGLISH TEACHER OPPORTUNITY: MAY ELABORATE ON THIS, ASSIGN JOURNAL TOPICS, CONNECT TO CLASS LITERATURE OR WALDEN DIRECTLY)

F) I’D LIKE TO KNOW:

- i. **This is not a separate section.** It is just one thought-probing question.
- ii. The question can be cultural, environmental, historical etc.
- iii. The whole class creates this and votes on the best question.
- iv. Classes will respond to each other’s questions in the language of the other country.

IV. Lesson Details

Since this is ongoing project and the newsletter template will stay the same throughout the year, I will detail 4 **INSPIRATION** selections that I chose as lesson examples.

Important notes:

- If an English teacher wants to participate in the project, it would be ideal for him/her to choose quotes and guide students through *Walden* or parts of *Walden*.
- If there is not an English teacher to work with, the language teacher would have to do a brief introduction on Thoreau or assign students to research him. He is serving as the model here, but other conservation writers, both American and international, would make the project most authentic as an international exchange of inspiration.

1. I have a room all to myself; it is nature.

-*Journal 3 January 1853.* (The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods Library)

Discuss how nature can be a room to one's self when it is shared with so many other living things. Have you ever been in a natural setting by yourself? What did it feel like? What did you notice?

2. A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.

-*Walden, The Ponds*, p. 435 (The Portable Thoreau)

Compare the natural place you have been observing to a physical human or animal feature. Explain your analogy.

3. We need the tonic of wildness...At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable.

-Walden, Spring, p. 557 (The Portable Thoreau)

What is the balance between observing and enjoying nature and disturbing it? Does ecotourism, for example, help or hurt an ecosystem? Reflect on the pro's and con's.

4. Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?

-Walden (Writings) Volume 2, page 11. (The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods Library)

What can we achieve in this project by "looking through each other's eyes"? How does one encourage empathy and how can it work towards solving problems?

V. List of Materials

- Access to *Walden* or selections (though, in Spanish class, not everyone needs their own copy)
- Personal journal to document observations and reflections upon nature
- Internet access (for research)
- Basic newspaper layout knowledge

VI. Rubric for newsletter

This rubric may be used for groups (ideally, groups create the sections if the whole class can commit to one site throughout the year) or modified to accommodate individual student interactions with each other (if one-to-one “blogs” are exchanged with individuals in the target country). This rubric should be used with each section of the newsletter. Point values are up to the discretion of the teacher.

	Excellent	Good	So-So	Needs work
CONTENT: Ideas are substantial, well-articulated, and thorough. Each entry is a minimum of 2 full paragraphs.	2 full paragraphs	2 paragraphs that need more elaboration	1-2 paragraphs that need more elaboration	1 paragraph or less
QUALITY: Ideas are original, reflect the writers’ voices, reflect the unique aspects of the local environment and avoid generic descriptions or clichés.	Very detailed, unique, can envision this area through readings, sounds like no other place	Good detail, but some descriptions can sound a bit generic	Descriptions rely too much on basic details. Does not always reflect unique habitat and sounds like it could be a lot of places.	Generic description and/or clichés are prevalent. Cannot tell which place is being described because it sounds like many others.
INSIGHT/ EVIDENCE OF RESEARCH: Research was done where appropriate or needed, ideas are not hasty or rushed, but reflect development and depth.	Profound, research is apparent, well-thought-out	Some depth in certain areas, shows signs of good planning	Writing sounds hasty at times with no real depth or personal insights	Ideas frequently sound forced or hasty. It’s obvious this was rushed or not thought-through.
OVERALL PRESENTATION AND ORGANIZATION: Each selection has been thoroughly edited for errors, organized according to the template, and polished to look professional.	Neat, no errors visually stimulating, pictures or art used when available and enhance the overall product. Follows the template	Neat, minimal errors, some visual stimulation if available. Followed the template closely but may have strayed a bit.	Neatness not consistent. Some errors. No visuals or unclear visuals. Did not follow template precisely.	Disorganized, not neat, not visually appealing. Did not follow instructions on template.

Artwork or photographs are easily discerned.	precisely.			
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VII. State Standards (NJ standards)

New Jersey Core Standards for World Language
Level: Intermediate Low

Communication: Interpretive Mode

- 7.1.8.A-4b Current or past issues and events at home or in the target country
7.1.8.A-5 Apply knowledge and skills gained in other core content areas to the learning of the target language.

Communication: Interpersonal Mode

- 7.1.8.B-3b Grade level appropriate science topics (e.g., characteristics and shared characteristics of major categories of organisms)

Communication: Presentational Mode

- 7.1.8.C-4 Describe orally, in writing, or through simulation, similarities and differences among products and practices found in the target culture with their own.

Culture: Interpretive Mode

- 7.2.8.A-1 Explain how the attitudes and beliefs (perspectives) of the target culture(s) are reflected in cultural practices

Culture: Interpersonal Mode

- 7.2.8.B-5. Describe past and present issues, events, and/or trends from the target culture perspective and the U.S. perspective.

VIII. Bibliography

1. Bode, Carl. The Portable Thoreau. New York: Penguin Books, 1980.
2. Henry D. Thoreau Quotation Page. 8 Aug. 2008. The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods Library.
<http://www.walden.org/Institute/thoreau/writings/Quotations/Quotations.htm>