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## A Sense of Place in American Literature

**Class:** Clinton High School - Honors English 10

**Description:** These lessons are created for a tenth grade honors level course at Clinton High School. This is a course designed for highly motivated students as a survey of American literature with exposure to the American short story, novel, play, poetry, and nonfiction. It is designed to recognize the links between literature and history and to integrate vocabulary, grammar, thinking, speaking, reading, and writing skills necessary to function in an advanced/college setting. This sequence of lessons will enhance the themes of this year-long course: American identity, the relationship between the community the individual, and society, civil disobedience, and the American Dream.

A sense of place will intertwine within the existing units as students explore how a *place* influences identity. Within this course, the term *place* will become an extended definition of setting, as students are encouraged to think about setting in terms of a physical setting, a historical setting, and a social setting. A sense of *place* will be explored at different levels - how *place* influences an author as he/she is writing, the effect that *place* has on the characters and plot in a text, and finally extended to the impact that *place* has on a student's own identity.

This unit contains six lessons that will be used with other texts and units throughout the year. The year begins with an introductory unit relating to personal identity leading into the idea of American identity and concludes with two texts that focus on community and an individual's roles and responsibilities within that society.

### Standards:

Massachusetts Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy, grades 9-10

RL/RI 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what a text states explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL/RI 2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of a text

RL/RI 10. Independently and proficiently read and comprehend literary texts representing a variety of genres, cultures, and perspectives and exhibiting complexity appropriate for the grade/course.

RI 5. Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter)

W 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W 6. Use technology, including current web-based communication platforms, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

W 7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W 8. When conducting research, gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

SL 1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL 5. Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., audio, visual, interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

L 1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking; retain and further develop language skills learned in previous grades.

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### Lesson 1: Iceberg Project

The Iceberg Project is an introductory unit for this Honors 10 course in which students read a quotation from Ernest Hemingway that is often referred to as his iceberg theory and discuss this as both readers and writers. This unit serves two main purposes. Students are introduced to the idea of reading below the surface, to make meaning beyond the literal interpretation, and they also reflect on their own identities and the factors that have influenced them. Within this reflection, students will be guided to include an awareness of place as they think about their own personalities and attributes and how both a physical setting and societal structures influence who they are.

#### Objectives

- Read and discuss Hemingway's iceberg theory
- Make connections between identity and a sense of place
- Reflect on own identities and the influencing internal and external factors
- Create written and multimedia representation of self identity

**Agenda** - This is a multi-day process in which students work both in groups and individually; most of the videos, readings, and assignments will be completed on a Hyperdoc created for this assignment and will then be submitted through Google Classroom.

Warm-up: Watch [video](#) and read [article](#) on Ernest Hemingway's Six Word Short Story

In groups, students create own six word short story and post on class Padlet. Use these videos for inspiration: [Six Word Memoirs by Teens](#) and [Six Word Memoirs: The Video Story](#).

Individually, open this [Google Draw document](#), read Hemingway's quote and draw an interpretation of it; this will be used to begin a class discussion of iceberg theory and how it applies to reading and writing

Project: (Instructions for students)

Part I: Write a description of yourself in which you compare yourself to an iceberg. Describe what part of your personality is on the surface and then what is below the surface. What do people know about you from a first meeting or observation? What more about you is there to know? How are you influenced by *place*, either a physical place or some aspect of society? This should be a multi-paragraph response.

Use the chart to below to brainstorm.

Part II: Create a multimedia visual representation of your whole self, including what is both above and below the surface. Some options for this include using Adobe Spark Page, Google Draw, Canva, or creating a video. See Ms. McGrail with other ideas.

| What aspects of you and your personality are "above the surface"?      | What aspects of you are "below the surface"?  |
|--|---|
| What might teachers (or others) who have just met you think about you? | What is important to you? What do you value?<br>What are things that you feel strongly about? |

The projects will be shared either on a class site or padlet and students will give informal presentations of the multimedia part of the project.

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## Lesson 2: American Identity

American Identity is the first text based unit of the course and is based on a Conversations unit in Literature and Composition: Reading, Writing, Thinking. Throughout this beginning unit in an American literature course, students will be encouraged to think about questions surrounding the idea of being American,

belonging in America, and how these ideas have evolved over time. The texts include poems, photos, a short story, and an essay.

**Objectives:**

- Brainstorm on topic of American identity
- Paraphrase poem
- Analyze poem for symbols, figurative language, imagery, and diction

**Agenda** - Warm-up: Freewrite on the following questions: What does it mean to be an American? What makes a person feel that he or she belongs in America? Has the concept of being an American changed over time? Use your own experiences, current events, your historical knowledge, or literature you have read to inform your response.

Four Corners Activity - Students will be directed to move to a corner of the room, each of which is labeled Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, based on a personal response to the following statements:

- It is important for a person to assimilate to the culture of the country he/she is living in.
- America is the most diverse country in the world.
- Race is the most important part of one's identity in America.
- Class is the most important part of one's identity in America.

As they move, students will discuss responses in pairs, then share with the whole class. After the activity, the class will debrief the discussion as a whole.

Various reading strategies will be used for the different texts in this unit. Students will complete the three column chart below for the Langston Hughes poem "Let America Be America Again." In this chart, students will interact with the text on two levels, summarizing the poem for a literal interpretation and then analyzing it for a deeper meaning. Students will work in groups and each group will be assigned a chunk of the text. Groups will share with the class and the poem will be read and discussed in its entirety. The focus of the analysis will be on the influence of Walt Whitman's classic poem "I Hear America Singing," but also on how Hughes questions and doubts as well as celebrates.

The final assessment for this unit will be an essay in response to the following prompt: *In the poem "The New Colossus," Emily Lazarus welcome those seeking*

*freedom and opportunity to come through “the golden door” of America. Has the United States lived up to this promise? Use a minimum of three texts from this unit to support your response.*

Let America Be America Again  
Langston Hughes, 1935

| Summarize | Poem   | Analyze |
|-----------|--|---------|
|           | <p>Let America be America again.<br/>Let it be the dream it used to be.<br/>Let it be the pioneer on the plain<br/>Seeking a home where he himself is free.</p> <p>(America never was America to me.)</p> <p>Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—<br/>Let it be that great strong land of love<br/>Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme<br/>That any man be crushed by one above.</p> <p>(It never was America to me.)</p>   |         |
|           | <p>O, let my land be a land where Liberty<br/>Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,<br/>But opportunity is real, and life is free,<br/>Equality is in the air we breathe.</p> <p>(There’s never been equality for me,<br/>Nor freedom in this “homeland of the free.”)</p> <p><i>Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?<br/>And who are you that draws your veil across the<br/>stars?</i></p>  |         |
|           | <p>I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,<br/>I am the Negro bearing slavery’s scars.<br/>I am the red man driven from the land,<br/>I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—<br/>And finding only the same old stupid plan<br/>Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.</p> <p>I am the young man, full of strength and hope,<br/>Tangled in that ancient endless chain<br/>Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!<br/>Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying<br/>need!<br/>Of work the men! Of take the pay!<br/>Of owning everything for one’s own greed!<br/>I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.<br/>I am the worker sold to the machine.<br/>I am the Negro, servant to you all.</p> |         |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <p>I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—<br/>         Hungry yet today despite the dream.<br/>         Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!<br/>         I am the man who never got ahead,<br/>         The poorest worker bartered through the years.</p>  |  |
|  | <p>Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream<br/>         In the Old World while still a serf of kings,<br/>         Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,<br/>         That even yet its mighty daring sings<br/>         In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned<br/>         That's made America the land it has become.<br/>         O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas<br/>         In search of what I meant to be my home—<br/>         For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,<br/>         And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,<br/>         And torn from Black Africa's strand I came<br/>         To build a "homeland of the free."<br/>         The free?</p> <p>Who said the free? Not me?<br/>         Surely not me? The millions on relief today?<br/>         The millions shot down when we strike?<br/>         The millions who have nothing for our pay?<br/>         For all the dreams we've dreamed<br/>         And all the songs we've sung<br/>         And all the hopes we've held<br/>         And all the flags we've hung,<br/>         The millions who have nothing for our pay—<br/>         Except the dream that's almost dead today.</p> |  |
|  | <p>O, let America be America again—<br/>         The land that never has been yet—<br/>         And yet must be—the land where <i>every</i> man is free.<br/>         The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's,<br/>         Negro's, ME—<br/>         Who made America,<br/>         Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,<br/>         Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,<br/>         Must bring back our mighty dream again.</p> <p>Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—<br/>         The steel of freedom does not stain.<br/>         From those who live like leeches on the people's<br/>         lives,<br/>         We must take back our land again,<br/>         America!</p>  |  |
|  | <p>O, yes,<br/>         I say it plain,<br/>         America never was America to me,<br/>         And yet I swear this oath—<br/>         America will be!</p>   |  |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | <p>Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,<br/> The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,<br/> We, the people, must redeem<br/> The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.<br/> The mountains and the endless plain—<br/> All, all the stretch of these great green states—<br/> And make America again!</p> |  |
|--|--|--|

### Lesson 3: Introduction to Transcendentalism

At this point in the year, students will have completed the American Identity unit and will have read Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. They will also have been assigned a string journal (adapted from Janet Burne) to be completed weekly one month prior to this lesson and will therefore have completed and submitted at least four journals. Students will be directed to bring in one of their journal entries for this class period that they will be willing to share.

#### Objectives

- Define transcendentalism
- Make connections between transcendentalism and work for string journals
- Identify Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau

**Agenda - Warm-up:** Rate experience of writing string journals and explain this rating.

Share in small groups and together make a prediction: Why did Ms. McGrail assign this journal? Use to lead into class discussion about string journals and the possible purpose of the assignment.

In small groups, students will be given the name of an American writer and will do basic research on this person's life and writing. The groups will post the basic information for this person with a photo on a class padlet so that each group will be able to read and see each other's work. The authors will include: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, Emily Dickinson, and Walt Whitman. These are authors whose works we will read throughout this course or whose lives were connected closely to the transcendental movement.



This activity will lead into notes on the basic elements of transcendentalism and its impact on the literature of the time period.

Guided reading: As a class we will read and annotate an excerpt from Emerson's "Nature." Students will be given the graphic organizer below and will trace the elements of transcendentalism through this excerpt. For homework, they will continue using the same graphic organizer with an excerpt from "Self-Reliance."

### TRANSCENDENTALISM

Transcendentalism was an intellectual movement that emphasized the dignity of the individual and advocated a simple, mindful life. The Transcendentalists wanted to transcend—or go beyond—the limitations of the senses and everyday experience. Key tenets include:

- a theory that "transcendent forms" of truth exist beyond reason and experience; every individual is capable of discovering this truth on his or her own, through intuition.
- a conviction that people are inherently good and should follow their own beliefs, however controversial they may be
- a belief that humankind, nature, and God are all interconnected

Directions: In the chart, record examples from each text for each element of Transcendentalism.

| Element of Transcendentalism   | Example from the Text |
|--|-----------------------|
| Every individual is capable of discovering higher truths on his or her own, through intuition. |                       |
| People are inherently good.  |                       |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Humankind, nature, and God are interconnected. |  |
|--|--|

Possible extension: Students will identify the term aphorism and as they read "Self-Reliance," they will record aphorisms used by Emerson throughout this essay and explain the meaning of each in their own words. Extensions can include illustrating these or creating short current-day scenarios in which they can be used.

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#### Lesson 4: Walk around the Wachusett

Our high school is located along the North Dike of the Wachusett Reservoir around which there are scenic walking trails, including ones leading to the historic Wachusett Dam. Depending on time of year and weather conditions, this lesson will involve a walk either to the Dam or simply along the trails. Students often walk along this route in physical education classes, some sports teams run along the trails, and others visit independently, so this walk will require specific instructions about emphasizing nature, rather than the walk itself.

#### Objectives:

- Respond in writing to Emerson and Thoreau quotations
- Silently observe natural world
- Write notes and reflections on observation in outdoors in journal or field notes

**Agenda - Warm-up:** Before leaving the classroom, students will participate in a series of quickwrites with quotations from Emerson and Thoreau. Each of the quotations listed below will be printed on a strip of paper. Each student will receive one strip of paper and will be directed to write continuously for two minutes. Once the two minutes have passed, students will pass the strip around the classroom so that everyone gets a new one. This will continue until students have responded to

6-8 of the quotes. Depending on time, these can be used as a discussion before or after the walk itself.

Before leaving, students will be instructed to bring a notebook or paper and a clipboard to write on, something to write with, and nothing else. All cell phones should be left inside. We will walk together to a general area along the trail and weather permitting, students will be given time to spread out and journal and/or write field notes. On the walk back to the school, students will be instructed to walk silently. Once we are back inside the classroom, students will be given time to continue their journals or add to their ideas and then the class will reflect on the experience together.

Possible extensions: If time and weather permit, this walk can lead into a series of walks through which students can be guided on the writing/journaling aspect of the experience. Specific instructions on field notes can be given and then connected to Thoreau's practice of noting and then journaling. Students can also be given specific instructions for observations while outside, including mapping a location, sketching a specific object in detail, or creating a metaphor for something observed.

“A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best.”  
What is something in your life that you have put your heart into and given your best?

“Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today... To be great is to be misunderstood.” Think of your life. What is an example of a time when you spoke your mind, demonstrated your beliefs, or showed integrity of the mind?

Name one thing you can do to simplify your life or schedule.

“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.”  
Name one “material possession” that you think you really need, but in reality you can do without.

It is okay to “dance to the beat of a different drummer.” Explain a time when you went your own way, explored something new, stood out from others, etc.

“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them...” Name one “castle in the air” (large dream/goal) that you have. Name one thing you are doing or plan to do to achieve that goal/dream.

“However mean your life is, meet it and live; do not shun it and call it hard names.” Think about a time in your life when things were hard, difficult, or even tragic. How did you grow from this experience?

“I went to the woods 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...I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...” If you died today, would you say that you had “lived” and “sucked out the marrow of life”? Why or why not?

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## Lesson 5: Universe of Obligation

This lesson is to be taught with Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* and is adapted from the Teaching Mockingbird resource from Facing History and Ourselves. The goal of this lesson is for students to think about and reflect on the moral universe of a community, specifically how a community determines who belongs and who does not, what the consequences exist for those who choose to challenge a community's rules, and what conflicts arise in literature out of the tension between characters and their setting.

### Objectives:

- Define universe of obligation
- Evaluate characters in novel for community's circle of responsibility
- Make real world connections to fictional setting of novel

**Agenda** - Warm-up: Students will respond to the question - *In the text, Scout describes some of Maycomb's ways. What are some Clinton High School's ways? What are important aspects of the culture of CHS that someone coming into this community would need to know?* Students will respond to this individually, then share with a partner, and then we will make a class list and discuss as a group. Discussion will make connection between Maycomb's ways and the culture of a community.

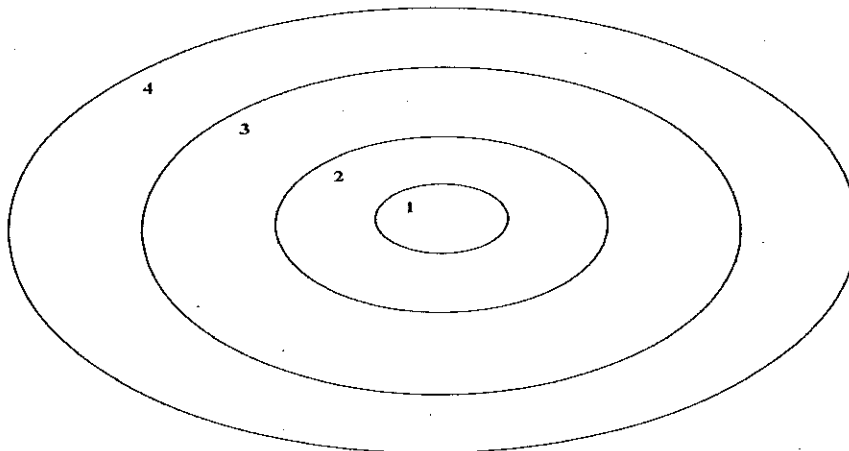
Students will take notes on the definition and history of the term universe of obligation. Students will create a diagram for themselves, listing groups of people to whom they feel a responsibility or a need to protect.

The class will then make a list of all of the characters met so far in the novel.

Activity: Students will follow the directions and the diagram below to define the moral universe of Maycomb, Alabama in *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

**Where would each of Maycomb's residents be placed inside Maycomb's circle of responsibility?**

1. Start inside the center circle (circle #1). Which residents receive the most respect and protection from the community's written and unwritten rules? (values, beliefs, social hierarchy)
2. For circles #2-3, which residents receive a different level of respect and protection?
3. Which residents receive the least protection or respect? Place them in circle 4.
4. Which residents do not receive any respect or protection? Place them outside the circle.
5. Provide 1-2 sentences/phrases to represent each of these people/groups as evidence of where he/she belongs in Maycomb's Circle of Responsibility.



Students will share their diagrams and explain their reasoning for putting each character in the given space. Once a variety of different circles have been shared, students will be led into a discussion of what observations can be made based on the circle, in terms of both the setting of the novel and bigger connections.

For homework, students will choose a community to which they belong—a school, neighborhood, nation, or a different group—and reflect on its universe of obligation. They will write a paragraph describing the moral universe of this community and as an extension, they will be asked to give their opinion on it. This will lead into a discussion the following day about an individual's responsibility to challenge the rules or customs of a community. This novel will be taught close to the end of the year and students will have therefore read and understood Thoreau's goals in "Civil Disobedience."

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### Lesson 6: My Town, Your Town, Our Town

This lesson is part the unit for Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town*, which will be the final text of the year in this course. Within this unit, students will explore the concepts of societal expectations and individualism, and how authors portray the ongoing conflict between society and self while making connections to the works of Emerson and Thoreau specifically throughout the reading. This lesson requires a close reading of excerpts of Act I that describe the town of Grover's Corners, a small community in which people know each other well and seem to go about the same mundane tasks each day. Many students will quickly make connections to the town in which our school is located, Clinton, MA. Within this lesson, students will work in groups to research aspects of Clinton based on the information provided in the text. This lesson is modified from a Group Assignment in the Prestwick House Activity Packet for *Our Town*.

#### Objectives:

- Read and paraphrase descriptions in text
- Identify tone of text and model within own writing
- Research using online, print, or town (in person) resources
- Present information orally and in writing to class

#### Agenda:

Warm-up: Students will respond to the following question - How would you describe Clinton to someone who has never been here? What are the first three

words that you think of to describe Clinton? What would you focus on if you were creating a travel guide for Clinton?

Several descriptions of Grover's Corners are offered in Act I of *Our Town*. The Stage Manager offers a basic description of Grover's Corners. Then, others are invited onstage to give their own accounts, which include scientific and anthropological data; a political and social description; and evidence of culture or love of beauty. Students will be divided into groups and each one will be assigned one of the following topics to research and write about Clinton.

- Describe the location and give a basic description of Clinton. Use the Stage Manager's description of Grover's Corners on pages 966-967 (in anthology) as your model. You may use the Stage Manager's line as your beginning: "Well, I'd better show you how our town lies. Up here—" Use the same tone that the Stage Manager uses. Create a map to go along with your description.
- Explain the history behind Clinton. Use Professor Willard's description of Grover's Corners on pages 971-972 as your model. Describe any historical landmarks, anthropological data, and the current population. Use the same tone that Professor Willard uses. Consider the history of Clinton as part of Lancaster, immigrant groups that have populated the town, and the flooding of the town and the construction of the Wachusett Dam. Include any relevant photos, maps, or graphs.
- Give a political and social report for Clinton. Use Mr. Webb's comments on pages 972-973 as your model. Describe voting practices, class (such as lower, middle, or upper), political parties, religion, and social practices. Use the same tone that Mr. Webb uses. Think about how the business of the town is run, political history in Clinton, customs and traditions.
- Tell about your town's culture or love of beauty. Use Mr. Webb's answer to the Lady's question on page 973 as your model. Describe any love of music, art, or books, for example. Use the same tone that Mr. Webb uses. Consider local pastimes or traditions that have become rooted in Clinton's history. Include any visuals that will enhance an understanding of this.

Students will write brief reports based on their research and share these with the class.

As the end of the year approaches and students complete a year in an American Literature course, they will be encouraged to make connections to various points in the year. These connections span to the beginning of the year, when they first introduced themselves and shared information about themselves connected to a place, to the writings of Thoreau that encourage them to live deliberately and with an understanding of the place around them, to the final unit in which they research aspects of their hometown to understand the value and importance of a single life in it. It is my hope that throughout this year, students will understand how *place* has affected American writers throughout history, how *place* has an impact on their lives and identities, and the responsibilities they have to the *place* around them and the people in it.



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