

Audra Bouleris

Approaching Walden-“Where I Lived and What I Lived For” Unit

Berne-Knox-Westerlo Central School District

1738 Helderberg Trail, Berne, NY 12023

Grade Levels 11 and 12

English

July 2022

Unit Overview

Students in 11th and 12th grade are at a place in their lives where they are beginning to form an idea of who they really are as a person, as well as finding their place in this world. Facilitating the development of the idea of place with the students is a very important task of the classroom teacher and a great responsibility. This two-three week unit will include whole group lessons, partner work, individual reading, and reflection writing time. Lessons will include mostly excerpts from Thoreau’s *Walden* and *Life Without Principle*. Other readings will be journal articles. The possibility of the use of other works such as *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* by John Muir, *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* by Cheryl Strayed and *Woodswoman* by Anne LaBastille, as well as other books that have a similar theme. Reading and Writing Workshop time is key to this unit, as well as field trips to local sites and the use of the school campus grounds for writing/reflection time. Anticipatory start date for Grade 12 will be in September with a spring start date for Grade 11 (possibly March, April or May). At the end of the unit, students will create their own writing piece that expresses their thoughts on “Where I Lived and What I Lived For” that defines their concept of place, how they see themselves in relation to this concept, as well as the beginning of the development of their belief on what place they will occupy in today’s society, and what they are living for.

Lesson Details

*All lessons are designed to take place in the classroom time period of approximately 42 minutes.

*Each day will begin with a journaling assignment that will allow students time to prepare their thoughts for the topic of the lesson or the class discussion. Journals should be the student’s own that they purchased.

Day 1: Introduction to the Meaning of “Place”

Journaling

Think of somewhere that you like to be or that gives you peace. Describe that place. What does this place mean to you and why? Write a list of the 10 most important places (in your opinion). Explain why you consider these places important?

Plan Details

1. Students will be asked to share their most important places with a student near them (turn and talk). After this, the whole class will share at least one of their important places. One student will be asked to record the answers on large (easel-sized) post it notes. Discussion about the importance of certain places and the meaning behind their importance will take place with the teacher facilitating but not leading the discussion.
2. Students will then be asked to research the meaning of the word place on their computers (give students 5 minutes) and add their definition to the JamBoard in Google Classroom. JamBoard will be displayed on the SMART board, so students can see the definitions as they appear. Once finished, ask students to comment on the definitions i.e. are they all the same, what are the differences, are there any definitions that seem out of place or wrong?
3. Give students a few minutes to brainstorm about how they would define the word place and the ideas, concepts and stories they might include in their definition of place.
4. Read through the guidelines for writing a definition paper with students. Teacher should use questioning so as to determine student comprehension of format and purpose of definition paper.

Assignment

Students will develop an extended definition for the word “place” in a writing piece.

Day 2: Introduction to Henry David Thoreau

Journaling

Describe how you could live and only work one or two days a week, without creating opportunities for making extra money. Do you even think this is possible? Why or why not?

Plan Details

1. Ask students what they know about Henry David Thoreau. Record answers on large post-it note sheet.
2. Read *Henry David Thoreau for Kids: His Life and Ideas* to students.
3. Refer back to the post-it sheet and have students come up and add to it based on what they learned in the reading.
4. Students should refer back to their journal entry for the day (reread if need be). Open a discussion with students as to how Thoreau might have responded to the journal

topic. If students need time to complete some research on Thoreau then allow for this.

5. Assignment

Students will design a Thoreau “quilt square” that represents a fact about Thoreau that they learned or in some way represents him. They can do it in any way they want. Squares must be 10x10.

Day 3-7: Economy

Journaling

Think about what you are wearing. EVERYTHING. Add the cost and divide by what the minimum wage is now (may require some discussion/research). Then figure out the number of hours you would have to work in order to afford everything that is on your person right now. Describe how much of your life and time you would have to give up in order to spend money on these items. Use Thoreau quote “the cost of a thing...”

Think about what a person really needs to live. What are some of these items? Write down everything that comes to mind. Then go back and look at your list. Star the items that a person could NOT do without. Then comment on this list by explaining if you could go without some of these items or not and why? Do you believe it makes a difference for a person to have these items or not and why?

What is your opinion of Thoreau after reading “Economy”? What are your reasons for this? Do you believe your character (the way you are) could sustain living like Thoreau did for any length of time? Why or why not?

Explore the concept of wealth. What does this word mean to you? Do you believe it is important to have an abundance of money? Why or why not? What are some of the benefits and detriments to having a lot of money and “things”? Think about your own lifestyle. Do you believe Thoreau would approve or disapprove, why or why not?

Plan Details

1. Students should spend some time reading and annotating “Economy”; and reflecting and writing in their journals, answering the questions above (2 days)
2. Check the annotation assignment for students. Have students reread their journal entry from the previous day as well as review their annotations while you are checking completed assignments.
3. Students should choose one idea that struck them in their reading and post to the discussion JamBoard.

4. Review JamBoard with students and (hopefully) this will lead to open discussion on America and our evident materialism. If not, lead the discussion with quotations from “Economy” such as:

"the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run"

“And when the farmer has got his house, he may not be the richer but the poorer for it, and it be the house that has got him"

"The head monkey in Paris puts on a traveler's cap, and all the monkeys in America do the same"

And have students comment on what they think Thoreau is saying and does it apply to society today?

5. Discussion will also address student opinion about Thoreau with supporting evidence from “Economy”-projected discussion about Thoreau’s experiment and whether or not it was successful

Assignment

Create your own “Thoreau” experiment for 2022. Develop a plan of action and list your costs. Where would you go? How would you live? Describe the house, area, food source etc. Reflect on your research: Could you do this? Is it even possible?

There are no right or wrong answers, only if you are not being honest with yourself and/or not explaining your thoughts.

You will have to research all the aspects of this plan and cite your sources.

Day 8-12-“Walking” Reading and Reflecting Days

Journaling

Each day students will spend some time walking out of doors on school grounds. (5 minutes or so). After this, they should sit (outside) and spend some time recording thoughts, what they saw, heard, touched etc).

Ask yourself: What did I see on my walk? How did I feel? Did this walk make me feel more relaxed or more stressed? What did I focus on in my walk?

Plan Details-Day 8-10

1. Students will read “Walking” by Thoreau. Students should respond to the five prompts after reading in a separate Google Doc.

Prompt 1

“It is true, we are but faint-hearted crusaders, even the walkers, nowadays, who undertake no persevering, never-ending enterprises. Our expeditions are but tours, and come round again in the evening to the old hearth-side from which we set out. Half the walk is but retracing our steps. We should go forth on the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of underlying adventure, never to return,—prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only as relics to our desolate kingdoms. If you are ready to leave father, mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again,—if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man, then you are ready for a walk.” (Thoreau, 358).

What is Thoreau saying here about walking? Is it symbolic? Explain why you think it is or why it isn't? Explain whether or not you agree or disagree with what he is saying.

Address the allusion to the Bible in the last sentence (hint-it is in the New Testament). Discuss what that means in your assessment of Thoreau or getting to know him? Why would he do that? Does it mean he is religious?

Prompt 2

“Moreover, you must walk like a camel, which is said to be the only beast which ruminates when walking. When a traveler asked Wordsworth's servant to show him her master's study, she answered, ‘Here is his library, but his study is out of doors.’ Living much out of doors, in the sun and the wind, will no doubt produce a certain roughness of character,—will cause a thicker cuticle to grow over some of the finer qualities of our nature, as on the face and hands, or as severe manual labor robs the hands of some of their delicacy of touch. So staying in the house, on the other hand, may produce a softness and smoothness, not to say thinness of skin, accompanied by an increased sensibility to certain impressions.” (Thoreau, 560-561)

How does Thoreau describe how one should walk? What is the commentary about living out of doors in the sense of what it “does” to people? What do you think is Thoreau's opinion about this?

Prompt 3

“In my walks I would fain return to my senses. What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?” (Thoreau, 561)

Describe what Thoreau is saying. Does he make a good point, why or why not? Do you believe today's society is guilty of “thinking out of the woods”? In what ways? Is this true of yourself?

Prompt 4

“What is it that makes it so hard sometimes to determine whither we will walk? I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright. It is not indifferent to us which way we walk. There is a right way; but

we are very liable from heedlessness and stupidity to take the wrong one. We would fain take that walk, never yet taken by us through this actual world...and sometimes, no doubt, we find it difficult to choose our direction, because it does not yet exist distinctly in our idea.” (Thoreau, 566)

What is the “walk” that Thoreau is describing here? (think symbolically) Comment on Thoreau’s statement about a “right way to walk”. Explain why Thoreau’s ideas might apply to your own life or to the lives of people today?

Plan Details-Days 11 and 12

1. “Walking” discussion. Pass around packets of post-it notes. Tell students to take as many as they want. Once students have their notes, tell them that they will need to write one comment or question about “Walking” on each note. Then they can come up and put them on the board and around the classroom.
2. After this, students will move about the room and choose two post it notes which they remove and take back to their seats. Students should read the question/comment and then either think of a response or write out their response or comment.
3. Circle discussion. Teacher will model reading the questions/comments and his/her own response. Students should follow around the circle.

***Hopefully this will spark tangential conversations and comments about Thoreau and the reading.**

Assignment

Read the following articles:

<https://bluefirewilderness.com/blog/nature-therapy-teens-calming-effects/>

<https://www.newportacademy.com/resources/mental-health/how-nature-supports-teen-mental-health/>

Summarize each article (3-5 sentences).

Then write a well-developed piece of writing that answers the following:

How do these articles relate to what Thoreau is saying about getting out of doors? What is your opinion about what the articles are saying about teen mental health and being outside? Support with specific examples. Do you believe that people your age spend too much time outdoors, why or why not?

What do you see as the benefit of walking (spending time outdoors)? Could this be a real influence on society in the way people act and react, as well as addressing problems in society today?

Days 13-21“Where I Lived and What I Lived For”

Journaling

Think about today. What is something or someone who has made you feel happy that you woke up today? (can be something you are looking forward to as well). Describe those feelings, experience or circumstance.

Read the following quote:

“...for a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.”

What does this mean to you? Do you believe this is true or not and describe an example of when this might be true and when it might not be true. Then, look at the example you gave for it NOT being true. What would happen if in that instant, things were “left alone”? Describe this and address the question of whether or not it would be negative.

Read the following quote:

“Many think that seeds improve with age. I have no doubt that time discriminates between the good and bad; and when at last I shall plant, I shall be less likely to be disappointed.”

What do you think Thoreau means by this? Describe how this can be applied to your own life and life in general.

Plan Details

1. Students will read Thoreau’s *Life Without Principle* and “Where I Lived and What I Lived For” from *Walden*.
2. As they read, students will complete a chart that addresses: application to real life situations in the text, sentences or phrases that held meaning for them, questions that they had about the topic/reading, and images that the author created.
3. At about Day 3 of this segment, class time will use literature circles (groups of 3) to discuss their charts and then a larger group circle to draw conclusions from the readings.

Final Assignment

Choose one of the books from the list below. Read it. Keep a journal of “Thoughts to Ponder” which could be quotes from the book, ideas triggered by the text, responses inspired by the reading, commenting on the connection to Thoreau or your own life.

*THIS IS KEY

These are free write journals. You simply need to write the date, and the text that inspired the entry.

THEN thinking of your reading and Thoreau. Compose your own “Where I Lived and What I Lived For”.

1. You will need to create your own title that is personal to you.
2. Spend some time thinking about where you grew up: the PLACE in nature where you spent most of your time. Describe this place in detail.
3. Spend some time thinking about what life message you want to convey in your piece. This piece should represent who you are and perhaps what you hope to become
4. Ask yourself these questions:
 - a. Who do you want to be?
 - b. What place am I going to hold in the world?
 - c. What is going to be my philosophy on life or for my life?
 - d. What are the most important elements to consider in life?
 - e. How is your “place” influential in developing who you are and your life message?
5. REMEMBER this is ALL INDIVIDUAL!! Everyone’s should be different.

READING LIST

Abbey, Edward	<i>Desert Solitaire</i>
Berry, Wendell	<i>The Unsettling of America</i>
Brestrup, Craig	<i>A Life Considered</i>
Bryson, Bill	<i>A Walk in the Woods</i>
Carson, Rachel	<i>Silent Spring</i>
Dillard, Annie	<i>The Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i>
Kerouac, Jack	<i>Big Sur</i>
LaBastille, Anne	<i>Woodswoman</i>
Dalai Lama	<i>The Art of Happiness</i>
Muir, John	<i>A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf</i>
Pirsig, Robert	<i>Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance</i>
Sasaki, Fumio	<i>Goodbye Things</i>
Strayed, Cheryl	<i>Wild</i>
Quinn, Daniel	<i>Ishmael</i>

Materials/Resources Needed

The materials needed for the unit:

Students’ personal journal (on the supply list)

The Portable Thoreau

Access to a computer/laptop

Resource:

Beth Davis (my librarian who participated three years ago) will co-teach the unit with me for both classes

Grading System/Assessment

Students' grades for English 12 are comprised of three parts:

Participation	30 %
Writing	45%
Classwork	25%

Students' grades for English 11H are comprised of four parts:

Participation	20%
Writing	35%
Classwork	20%
Homework	25%

Student journal writing will be graded according to a rubric based on the following designation and criteria:

Beyond Thoughtful: Shows great insight.
May be exceptionally creative
Demonstrated a sophisticated style
93-100%

Thoughtful: Completes the requirements of the journal entries.
Shows effort in creating a response that answers the assignment
85-92%

Not Acceptable: Does not meet expectations.
Entries NOT in the journal
Entries NOT completed on time
Careless work (grammar, spelling issues, lack of length, superficial Response)
55%

All other writing will be graded with rubrics. All assignments with the exception of the final project will be weighted the same.

Other

New York State Standards for ELA

http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf

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