Unit Overview:

Students will compose, revise, and publish original written work based on a sense of place from their personal experiences. Students will read excerpts that demonstrate this type of writing, reflect on their own sense of place from a personal perspective, and demonstrate their ability to write about it in a meaningful way. Students will work together to share and edit their writing in order to submit a completed, high-quality paper. This paper will be no fewer than 400 words and no more than 600 words (approximately two double-spaced pages at size 12 font). We will work on this unit over a five-day period during the first marking period of the school year. It will be a good opportunity for students to craft a response that displays their current writing ability and gives both the teacher and other students an insight into parts of their lives that students are willing to share. This unit will allow students to: write narratives to develop real experiences and/or events, use techniques such as description and reflection to elaborate on their experiences, incorporate sensory language to convey vivid pictures, and provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced over the course of the personal essay.

Lesson Details:

Day One – 40 Minutes

Objective: Students will read four excerpts from various authors that demonstrate writing about a familiar or meaningful place. Students will brainstorm ideas for a personal essay involving a significant place that they have experienced.

Procedure: Students will read four excerpts. These include:

Walden, Henry David Thoreau, “Solitude,” Paragraphs 1–4
Spark Bird, Emily Raboteau, “Section VI,” Paragraphs 1-8
The Road, Cormac McCarthy, “Chapter 1,” Paragraphs 1-6

After reading the excerpts aloud, we’ll discuss the daily plan for the five-day unit. The prompt for this writing assignment is as follows:

We’ve read some examples of authors who wrote about places that are significant to them. For this assignment, you’ll write a personal essay about a place that holds special meaning for you. You have the flexibility to describe the physical features of this place in order for your reader to get a sense of the wonder you get from being there or to describe why this place affects you in a way that makes it meaningful to you. You may also choose to combine both of these features in your essay. Use a Google Doc to write a double-spaced, size 12 paper of between 400–600 words. You may choose to write your first draft on paper, but you’ll need a Google Doc by Day 3 in order to participate in a revision activity. Please see me if you have any questions about the assignment.

Materials: Reading excerpts, writing prompt

Homework: Begin thinking about a place from your life that you find meaningful. You can brainstorm by jotting down physical aspects of this place and how/why you have such a connection to it. You do not need to begin your personal essay in a formal way; instead, just reflect on this place and its significance in your life.

Day Two – 40 Minutes

Objective: Students will review the excerpts from yesterday’s reading and the requirements for their personal essays. Students will utilize class time to work on their papers.

Procedure: Reread excerpts and review essay format and requirements. We will discuss aspects of the scoring rubric:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTSTANDING</th>
<th>SATISFACTORY</th>
<th>NEEDS IMPROVEMENT</th>
<th>NOT EVIDENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IDEAS</strong></td>
<td>The main idea of the paper is clear. The essay is interesting, even memorable. The writer seems to have in-depth understanding of or insight about the topic. The writer is selective, including details that hold a reader's attention throughout the piece.</td>
<td>The reader can identify the writer's main idea. The writer has some knowledge of the topic; more would enrich the paper. The writing includes some interesting details—enough to make the reader wish for more.</td>
<td>This paper has no main idea. The writing consists mainly of random thoughts. The reader cannot extract anything meaningful. It is all but impossible to summarize this writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOCUS</strong></td>
<td>The writer is focused throughout the essay. The writing focuses on details of the place or on feelings this place evokes in the writer. There is a strong conclusion that complements the details found in the essay.</td>
<td>The writer may meander briefly, but not enough to distract/confuse the reader. The pattern works most of the time. The conclusion is fairly standard but functional.</td>
<td>The text is a disjointed collection of random thoughts. There is no identifiable structure or pattern. There is no real conclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOICE</strong></td>
<td>This voice is individual. The reader would want to read this aloud to someone. The writing is passionate and compelling. The voice is perfect for the purpose and audience.</td>
<td>This voice is distinctive, if not unique. The reader might share moments of this piece aloud. Passion, energy, or strong feelings are evident in some places. The voice is acceptable for the audience and purpose, but it could use refinement.</td>
<td>This voice is difficult to find, identify, or describe. Lack of voice means that the reader probably will not share this by reading aloud. No energy or excitement comes through. The voice is missing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WORD CHOICE</strong></td>
<td>The writing is clear, striking, original, and precise. The writer uses powerful parts of speech to enliven writing. Figurative language enhances meaning. The writing is concise.</td>
<td>The writing is clear in most cases. Some words or phrases are vague and confusing. The writer is inconsistent in use of parts of speech. Figurative language is present, if needed. Some writing is concise; wordy moments are noticeable.</td>
<td>Words and phrases are vague, confusing, or misused. Parts of speech are missing. Figurative language is minimal or absent. Word use is basic and unclear.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students will use the remainder of the class period to begin crafting their responses.

**Materials:** Reading excerpts, writing prompt, Google Doc, scoring rubric

**Homework:** Continue working on your essay. First drafts are due at the start of Day 3.

**Day Three—40 Minutes**

**Objective:** Students will collaborate to review and evaluate personal essays.

**Procedure:** Each student will be assigned two other students from the class. We’ll use the first five-ten minutes to discuss assignments and procedures for reviewing and evaluating papers. Students will be asked to first read the essay in its entirety before commenting on a Google Form provided by me in our Google Classroom. During their second reading of the essay, they will answer questions from the provided form. Questions are as follows:

1. Type your name.
2. Type the writer’s name.
3. What did you like most about the essay?
4. Does the piece have a natural progression from beginning to end? If so, how is this accomplished? If not, how can the author make the essay flow more effectively?
5. This essay must describe a specific place and/or the author’s feelings about this place. Which of those seemed stronger in the essay?
6. Is there specific language that you feel is particularly expressive and effective in this piece? If so, point it out here.
7. Is there specific language that you feel is somewhat stilted or dragging the pace of the essay? If so, point it out here.
8. You are required to give at least one piece of advice, but feel free to offer as much as you can. How can the writer revise this essay to make it better? Be specific!

Students will read and respond to two essays during the last thirty to thirty-five minutes of class.

**Materials:** Google Docs (to be shared with readers), Google Forms (completed by readers)

**Homework:** None
Day Four–40 Minutes

Objective: Students will read their peer reviews. Students will utilize class time to revise their papers.

Procedure: Today students will read their peer reviews from Day 3. I’ll share the completed Google Forms with them. We’ll take a look at two more excerpts:

*Walden*, Henry David Thoreau, “Conclusion,” Paragraphs 5–9
*A Walk in the Woods*, Bill Bryson, “Chapter 21,” Paragraphs 44–53

Students will then focus on moving from the general descriptions provided in their essays to a meaningful conclusion that allows each writer to think about their experiences in this place and compose an ending that demonstrates thoughtful reflection.

Materials: Peer reviews (Google Forms), excerpts, first-draft essays

Homework: Complete your paper. Remember to use the required format of 400–600 words, double-spaced, size 12 font. Use the scoring rubric to develop your personal essay.

Day Five–40 Minutes

Objective: Students will watch a video on Walden and review their work. Students will share their essays aloud and submit their final drafts.

Procedure: Today students will watch the first thirteen minutes of the Walden video on YouTube produced by Ken Burns. It can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLTgTvOSd84&t=1025s

Students will be given the opportunity to share their essays with others through an essay exchange or a reading in front of the class. Students who read aloud will receive credit towards their final grade.

Materials: YouTube videos, Walden Woods Project website, final-draft essays

Homework: As an optional activity, students may submit their personal essays on the Walden Woods Project website: https://www.walden.org/education/wheres-your-walden/
Pennsylvania State Standards:

CC.1.4.9–10.A: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately.

CC.1.4.9–10.C: Develop and analyze the topic with relevant, well-chosen, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic; include graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CC.1.4.9–10.D: Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section.

CC.1.4.9–10.O: Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, reflection, multiple plotlines, and pacing to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.

CC.1.4.9–10.T: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CC.1.4.9–10.U: Use technology, including the Internet, 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.

CC.1.5.9–10.A: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.