Henry David Thoreau Curriculum Unit

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Exploring Henry David Thoreau
Miami Dade College
11011 SW 104 Street, Miami, FL 33176
Freshman level
ENC1102: English Composition II
8/2/2024

_Overarching Objective:_ Students will understand the key themes, historical context, and philosophical underpinnings of Henry David Thoreau's works, especially focusing on "Walden" and "Civil Disobedience." They will analyze his writing style, discuss his influence on American literature and thought, and apply his ideas to contemporary issues. Students will also complete a unit project and reflective essay on HDT. By the end of this unit, students should have a comprehensive understanding of Henry David Thoreau’s work, his theoretical contributions, and the lasting relevance of his ideas.

Time frame: Five Weeks (1 day per week 1 hr. 15 min. Blended Course)

Lesson Plan 1: Introduction to Thoreau and Transcendentalism

Objective: Students will gain an understanding of Henry David Thoreau’s life, the historical context in which he wrote, and the main principles of Transcendentalism.

Materials:
- Presentation on Thoreau’s biography including pictures from Walden Pond, Walden Museum, and surrounding areas from Concord.
- Handouts on Transcendentalism link: [https://emersoncentral.com/ebook/The-Transcendentalist.pdf](https://emersoncentral.com/ebook/The-Transcendentalist.pdf)
- Excerpts from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s "Nature" link: [https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/nature-1](https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/nature-1)

Activities:
1. Introductions: _Who is Thoreau to You?_ (Introductions with Thoreau Quotes)
2. Lecture: Introduce Thoreau’s biography, emphasizing his time at Harvard, his relationship with Emerson, and his time at Walden Pond.

3. Classroom or Canvas Discussion: Explore the key principles of Transcendentalism and how they influenced Thoreau.

4. Group Activity: Analyze excerpts from Emerson’s "Nature" to understand the foundation of Transcendentalist thought.

5. Homework: Read the introduction and first chapter of "Walden."
Lesson Plan 2: Analyzing "Walden" - Simplicity and Nature

Objective: Students will explore the themes of simplicity and nature in "Walden" and how Thoreau’s experiment at Walden Pond reflects these ideas.

Materials:
- Copies of "Walden" Link to purchase: [Walden Book](#)
- Handouts with key quotes and questions (Refer to Appendix A)

Activities:
1. Classroom or Canvas Discussion: Review the assigned reading, focusing on Thoreau’s reasons for living at Walden Pond.
2. Reading: Analyze and highlight key passages that emphasize simplicity and the connection to nature.
3. Small Group Activity: In small groups, students will discuss how the ideas of simplicity and nature are relevant today and share their thoughts with the class.
4. Homework: Read selected chapters from "Walden" (e.g., "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," "Solitude").
Objective: Students will understand the arguments presented in "Civil Disobedience" and its impact on social and political thought.

Materials:
- Copies of "Civil Disobedience" (one per group)
- Handout with discussion questions for groups for a total of 6 groups
  (Refer to Appendix B)

Activities:
1. Lecture: Provide historical context for "Civil Disobedience," including Thoreau’s protest against the Mexican-American War and slavery.
2. Classroom or Canvas Discussion: Analyze the main arguments in "Civil Disobedience" and Thoreau’s views on government and individual conscience.
3. Classroom Debate: Students will be divided into two groups to debate the relevance and effectiveness of civil disobedience in today’s society.
4. Homework: Read "The Bean-Field" and "Conclusion"
Lesson Plan 4: Thoreau’s Writing Style and Rhetorical Techniques

Objective: Students will analyze Thoreau’s writing style, use of rhetorical techniques, and his ability to convey philosophical ideas through literature.

Materials:
- Copies of "Walden" and "Civil Disobedience Audiobook"
- Handouts on rhetorical devices (Refer to Appendix C)
- Multimedia resources-videos/podcasts from YouTube (Refer to Appendix D)

Activities:
1. Lecture: Discuss Thoreau’s writing style, including his use of metaphor, imagery, and rhetorical questions.
2. Reading: Examine specific passages from "Walden" and "Civil Disobedience" for rhetorical techniques.
3. Multimedia Activity: Watch a documentary or listen to a podcast about Thoreau’s impact and discuss its content. (Refer to Appendix D)
4. Unit Assignment: A ten-minute PowerPoint or Canva Presentation on a chosen aspect of Thoreau’s philosophy. Student are encouraged to interview Mr. Jeffrey S. Cramer via zoom at Walden Pond Project. Contact: Email Jeff Cramer

Examples can range from: Simplicity, Environmentalism, social justice, self-reliance, materialism, inspiration and solitude, and literary influences. (Appendix A: Presentation Outline)
Lesson Plan 5: Thoreau’s Legacy and Contemporary Relevance

Objective: Students will evaluate Thoreau’s legacy and discuss the contemporary relevance of his ideas.

Activities:

1. Presentations: Students present their unit assignments, discussing aspects of Thoreau’s philosophy and its relevance today.

2. Reflection: Students will write a reflective essay on what they have learned about Thoreau and how his ideas can be applied to modern life. (Gordon Rule Rubric Appendix F)
Appendix A

Handout 1: Simplicity and Living Deliberately

Key Quotes

1. "I went to the woods because I wished 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."
   
   o Discussion: What does Thoreau mean by "live deliberately"? How does this idea relate to our modern lives?

2. "Our life is frittered away by detail... Simplify, simplify."
   
   o Discussion: In what ways can we simplify our lives today? What are the benefits and challenges of doing so?

Questions

1. What motivated Thoreau to leave society and live in the woods? How do you think this decision impacted his view of life?

2. How does Thoreau's idea of simplicity contrast with today's fast-paced, technology-driven world?

3. Can you think of any modern movements or philosophies that echo Thoreau's call for simplicity?
Handout 2: Nature and Self-Reliance

Key Quotes

1. "I never found a companion that was so companionable as solitude."
   o *Discussion*: How does Thoreau view solitude? How does it contribute to his understanding of himself and nature?

2. "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads."
   o *Discussion*: How does this quote reflect Thoreau's view of nature and its importance? What does it suggest about his spiritual beliefs?

Questions

1. How does Thoreau's time at Walden Pond reflect his philosophy of self-reliance?
2. In what ways does Thoreau find peace and fulfillment in nature? How does this compare to your experiences in nature?
3. What role does solitude play in Thoreau's life at Walden Pond? How can solitude be beneficial or detrimental?
Handout 3: Society and Individualism

Key Quotes

1. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation."
   - **Discussion**: What does Thoreau mean by "quiet desperation"? How does this idea challenge conventional notions of success and fulfillment?

2. "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."
   - **Discussion**: How does this quote encapsulate Thoreau's views on individuality? What does it mean to "hear a different drummer"?

Questions

1. How does Thoreau critique society and its values in "Walden"? Do you agree with his criticisms? Why or why not?

2. In what ways does Thoreau advocate for individualism? How can we apply his ideas to our own lives?

3. How does Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond serve as a critique of contemporary society?
Appendix B

Discussion Questions on “Civil Disobedience”

1. "That government is best which governs least."
   - What does Thoreau mean by this statement? How does it reflect his overall philosophy regarding government?
   - Do you agree with Thoreau's assertion? Why or why not?

2. The Purpose of Government
   - According to Thoreau, what is the purpose of government? How does he believe it fails to fulfill this purpose?
   - How does Thoreau's view of government compare to the current role of government in our society?

3. The Duty of Civil Disobedience
   - What does Thoreau believe is the individual's duty when faced with unjust laws?
   - How can civil disobedience be an effective form of protest? Can it also have limitations or risks?

4. Conscience and Law
   - Thoreau argues that individuals should not permit governments to overrule their consciences. Do you agree? Why or why not?
   - How can individuals balance their personal conscience with their obligations as citizens?

5. Thoreau's Refusal to Pay Taxes
   - Why does Thoreau refuse to pay his poll tax? What larger principle is he standing up for?
   - What are the consequences of Thoreau's act of civil disobedience? Do you think his actions were justified?

6. Justice and Injustice
   - Thoreau states, "If the machine of government is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law." What does he mean by this?
   - How do you determine when it is appropriate to follow or break the law based on your moral beliefs?
Each person in the group answers their own Personal Reflection

- Have you ever felt compelled to take a stand against an injustice? What actions did you take, or what might you consider doing in the future?
- How can individuals today practice civil disobedience in a way that aligns with Thoreau's principles while remaining safe and effective?
Appendix C
Rhetorical Techniques Handout

1. Ethos (Ethical Appeal)
   - Definition: Establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of the speaker or writer.
   - Examples:
     o A doctor giving health advice.
     o A celebrity endorsing a product.
   - Questions to Consider:
     o How does the speaker establish credibility?
     o What qualifications or experiences does the speaker share to gain trust?

2. Pathos (Emotional Appeal)
   - Definition: Appealing to the audience's emotions to evoke feelings such as pity, fear, joy, or anger.
   - Examples:
     o A charity ad showing sad images of animals to elicit sympathy.
     o A political speech invoking patriotic feelings.
   - Questions to Consider:
     o What emotions is the speaker trying to evoke?
     o How does the language or imagery used contribute to the emotional appeal?

3. Logos (Logical Appeal)
   - Definition: Using logical reasoning and evidence to persuade the audience.
   - Examples:
     o Statistics and facts supporting an argument.
     o Logical reasoning and clear arguments.
   - Questions to Consider:
     o What evidence is presented to support the argument?
     o Are the arguments logically sound and well-organized?
Appendix D

Multi-media Resources

Political Theory

Civil Disobedience Audiobook

Walden Film by The Walden Wood Project

The Art of Living Deliberately - Does Thoreau's Great Experiment at Walden Pond Still Matter Today?

Henry David Thoreau documentary

Thoreau scholar Jeffrey S. Cramer: "Thoughts from a Life with Thoreau"

To Live Deliberately - Jeffrey Cramer - The Interlocutor Podcast - Ep. 14

I wished to live deliberately - Jeffrey Cramer on Henry David Thoreau's famous line.
Appendix E

Project Presentation Outline

No more than 10 minutes

Each presentation should follow a clear structure:

1. Introduction:
   - Introduce the topic and its relevance.
   - Provide a brief overview of Thoreau’s life and works.
   - Include thesis statement with stance.

2. Main Body:
   - Historical Context: Place Thoreau’s ideas in the context of his time.
   - Thoreau’s Views: Detailed explanation of Thoreau’s philosophy on the chosen topic.
   - Examples from Texts: Use specific excerpts from "Walden," "Civil Disobedience," and other writings to support your position. Remember to Cite, cite, cite!

3. Modern Connections:
   - Draw parallels between Thoreau’s ideas and contemporary issues.
   - Provide examples of how his philosophy is applied today.

4. Conclusion:
   - Summarize the key points.
   - Reflect on the enduring relevance of Thoreau’s philosophy.

5. Q&A:
   - Encourage questions and discussion to engage the audience.
Appendix F
Gordon Rule Rubric for Reflective Essay

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demonstrates Effective Development:</th>
<th>Demonstrates Satisfactory College-Level Writing</th>
<th>Demonstrates Proficient College-Level Writing</th>
<th>Demonstrates Exemplary College-Level Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis evident but support very general and/or inconsistent. Several factual errors</td>
<td>Thesis evident but supported by a mixture of generalizations and specific detail. Some factual errors</td>
<td>Thesis, stated or implied, presents a plan of development that is carried out. Effective supporting details. Consistent development. No factual errors.</td>
<td>Stated or implied thesis developed logically, coherently and extensively with convincing, specific supporting details. Strong evidence of critical thinking. No factual errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent errors in word choice. Sentence structure and mechanics seriously affect clarity.</td>
<td>Word choice correct but simpler/without variety. Errors in mechanics and/or usage do not obscure content of assignment.</td>
<td>Word choice accurate, varied. Occasional errors in sentence structure, usage and mechanics do not hinder writer's ability to communicate purpose.</td>
<td>Choice of language consistently precise, purposeful. Nearly flawless sentence structure, usage, mechanics contribute to writer's ability to communicate purpose.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demonstrates Effective Organization of Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loose focus on central idea, contains some repetition and digression. Paragraph structure weak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central idea evident. Paragraph structure sometimes supports content. Consistency, logic and transitions show some weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central idea clear. Paragraph structure uniformly supports content. Consistency, logic and transitions well managed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central idea clear. Paragraph structure consistently and effectively supports content. Clear logic and effective transitions.</td>
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Appendix G

ENC1102 English Composition 2 Course Competencies

Course Description: This is the second required general core course in college level writing. Students will learn the conventions of standard edited American English. Students will compose informative and persuasive essays, write responses to a variety of literary genres and/or non-fiction, and produce a documented paper based on research. This course fulfills the Gordon Rule requirement and must be completed with a grade of "C" or better. (3 hr. lecture)

Prerequisite: ENC1101

Competency 1: The student will compose essays that explain an idea, belief, or attitude by:

1. choosing and limiting a subject that can be sufficiently developed within a given time, for a specific purpose and audience.
2. formulating a thesis reflecting the subject and purpose of the essay.
3. supporting the thesis with specific details and arranging them logically.
4. using appropriate transitional devices.
5. writing an effective conclusion.

Competency 2: The student will present writing that seeks to persuade an audience to accept a belief, attitude, value, or course of action by:

1. using logical, ethical, and/or emotional appeals appropriate to audience and purpose.
2. demonstrating logical reasoning.
3. providing sufficient evidence to support the thesis.
4. clearly acknowledging any sources by using a standard form of documentation.

Competency 3: The student will write responses to a variety of literary genres by:

1. reflecting a literal and critical comprehension of the reading
2. providing suitable support and organization.
3. articulating the author’s point of view and technique.

Competency 4: The student will write a documented research paper by:
1. choosing a topic.
2. using library and electronic resources to fulfill research objectives.
3. taking notes, paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting sources.
4. articulating a thesis that demonstrates a logical connection between research and argumentative techniques.
5. organizing the text to be congruent with the subject and purpose of the paper.
6. using sources in the text to substantiate the thesis.
7. using a standard form of documentation (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.).
References

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. “Self-Reliance.”

Thoreau, Henry David. Walden.


https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/nature-1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tu6bFWTQ1f4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCb5GubMZh0&t=49s