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Approaching Walden

Unit Outline

*A consideration of Henry David Thoreau as part of a larger unit on **Utopias and Dystopias***

Context: As part of the 10th grade World Literature curriculum students will explore the notion of an ‘ideal society’ and whether such a thing exists. Included in this extended unit will be selections from Thoreau that both question an individual’s relationship to his larger society as well as delineate Thoreau’s beliefs about the subject.

Readings:

Utopia-Thomas Moore
Herland-Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Brave New World- Aldous Huxley

Selections from *Walden*
“Where I Lived and What I Lived For”
“Higher Laws”
“Conclusion”

Also, “Civil Disobedience”
“Life without Principle”

Activities:

1. *Creating an Ideal Civilization:* This activity requires students to articulate their vision of a utopian community. In creating their utopias they need to consider:
-a citizen’s role in society
-rules, regulations and requirements
-justice system/ penalties for infractions

Also: -aesthetics and design
i.e. What will it all look like?

This exercise serves as a backdrop and reference point for the rest of the unit. As students read the various texts they will compare and contrast their own views with those of the writers they are examining.

2. *Class Discussions:*

Topics: Is an ideal society possible? Why /why not?

Why is the concept of 'utopia' so pervasive and alluring to people?

How might a 21st century American's version of utopia differ from an individual who is not an American? (** *If necessary, use outside resources and newspaper articles to provide students with a frame of reference.*)

Survey evaluation and discussion (See below for information on the survey.)

3. *Carousel:*

Prior to class generate six provocative, open-ended questions based upon the readings. Using large sheets of paper write one question on each sheet. Hang the sheets around the room at equal intervals. Divide students into small groups of 4-5. Each group should begin at a different sheet/question. All the groups will rotate around the room spending about 3-4 minutes per station.

4. *Survey:*

The class will generate and administer a 25-question survey to a random sampling of 100 individuals in their community. Included in the survey will be demographic information (so the class can analyze the data considering such factors as age and gender) as well as a series of questions asking individuals to prioritize the elements necessary to create a 'perfect society'. Once the information has been gathered students will analyze the information and create a summary of findings. The results of the survey as well as the process of its creation and administration will be the basis of one day's class discussion. (**See *Class Discussions* above**)

5. “Henry David Thoreau and Living in the Real World”:

As the unit concludes we’ll transition from the theoretical notions of utopias and dystopias to how we can better live in an imperfect world. Using Henry David Thoreau’s essays as the basis for this portion of the unit we will consider what we can do to improve our society, how we can effect change, and what recourse we have as citizens when we do not agree with government policy.

Assessments:

Essay-Over the course of the unit each student will develop an individual essay topic suggested by the readings.

Student Generated Test(s)- As the unit progresses students will generate questions about the readings for use in the creation of tests. Some questions will be objective; others will be open-ended. (The teacher will create the actual test after refining and reworking the student generated questions.)

This unit is in the earliest stage of development. Please pardon its vagueness!