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### **Transcendentalist Unit**

#### **Choice and Change: A Transcendental Guide to Social Action**

##### Introduction and Purpose:

These lessons will follow an introduction to transcendental thought and the Transcendental movement. Students will be introduced to the social action essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller. Secondary to this, though equally important, students will review certain strategies to employ when working with complicated text. This unit, which is really the second half of a greater unit, will be conducted with an 11<sup>th</sup> grade Honors class studying American Literature. Please note that while these lessons are written up sequentially by day, they may be followed over a different course of time. In addition, though they are important, I did not add the notes that I will give students in covering this unit. As this unit is merely a draft, the presentation and organization of material are bound to change.

##### Objectives:

1. Students will investigate historical context and research historical information to better understand literature being read.
2. Students will recognize the moral and political tenets of Transcendental thought
3. Students will analyze theme, tone, and style of writing.
4. Students will work collaborate in groups and hold meaningful conversations/discussions in examining text.
5. Students will examine and reflect on social responsibility and action today through investigating societal problems.
6. Students will show an understanding of social movements and collective behavior.
7. Students will keep a thought journal.
8. Students will write a persuasive essay.
9. Students will develop a community service project in an area determined by the class.

##### Strands and Standards:

Language Strand: 1, 2, 4, 6

Reading and Literature Strand: 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15

Composition Strand: 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25

Process:

DAY ONE:

1. Students will be given the lyrics to Bob Dylan's 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' (Teachers may want to substitute 'Time' by Pink Floyd, 'Who Are You?' by Pearl Jam, or 'Revolution' by The Beatles). After (or while) listening to the song, students will respond by writing in their journals for approximately 20 minutes. These journals will be collected at the conclusion of the Transcendentalist unit. Students will be asked to read responses to the class (strictly voluntary). A class discussion will follow. Possible discussion topics include the following: What do you think Dylan is saying? Is his song applicable today? How? What is the "battle" Dylan mentions? What is the role of adults? Youth? What is an individual's responsibility to change in a community? This final question is important as it will transition the discussion from Dylan to Emerson and the Transcendentalists.

2. Students will begin reading 'Self-Reliance' by Ralph Waldo Emerson together. Teacher directed questions include: How do you define "self-reliance"? What does Emerson mean by "envy is ignorance and imitation suicide"? According to Emerson, what is it to be a non-conformist and why should an individual aspire to be one? What commentary is Emerson making on social responsibility? Explain his discussion of charity. (I have 2 different textbook versions of 'Self-Reliance', one from Prentice Hall and the other from Scott Foresman. I am not sure if I will use either version, the entire essay, or pieces I collect from it.)

3. Emerson references analogies throughout the essay. Because of this, I may wrap up my discussion of this passage and the day with some SAT work examining analogies,

4. Students will read 'Life Without Principle' by Henry David Thoreau for homework. In writing they will respond to the following:

- A) According to Thoreau, what is a life with principles?
- B) Thoreau in his essay makes a number of points that are relevant today. Discuss and apply two.
- C) Highlight a passage you found difficult and one you found interesting/powerful. Provide your reasoning.

Each of the above responses requires textual support and evidence.

DAY TWO:

1. Students will break into groups of 4. They will discuss their passages from the night before. They will be expected to take notes on this experience. The class will converge and discuss both the individual group discussions and student responses to the exercise.

2. What if...? Students will fill in the blank with one thought.

EX:

What if I lived in a cave instead of a house? They will free-write/create/draw responses covering as many avenues of this question as possible. This will remain in their journal that will be collected at the conclusion of the unit.

DAY THREE:

1. A brief exercise in tone: Two students will draw an index card from a pile. The index card will have an emotion written on it. The volunteers will be asked to recite a nursery rhyme conveying this emotion. Classmates will have to guess the emotion. A discussion of tone will follow. How does a writer convey tone to a reader? How can a reader "hear" the attitude of the speaker if words are unspoken? We will apply a discussion of this by carefully reviewing an excerpt of Thoreau's A Plea for Captain John Brown. Careful attention will be paid to the actual print, use of punctuation, word choice, and repetition, etc...
2. Students will "What if?" journal responses.
3. Students will read interactively read Thoreau's essay Slavery in Massachusetts. In addition students must address the following: What is the tone of Slavery in Massachusetts? What commentary is Thoreau making about slavery? Use textual evidence to support both responses. The reading is due tomorrow. The writing is due in two days.

DAY FOUR:

1. Students will pass around their responses to Thoreau's essay in small groups and make comments on each other's margin notes. Attempts should be made to answer questions and add commentary. This should be a dialogue on paper. We will regroup in 30 minutes. Each group will present one thing they found interesting in the exercise.
2. Journal response: Respond to the following Emerson quote: Passion, though a bad regulator, is a powerful spring. Discuss what Emerson means and apply it. Consider the definition of passion. Discussion to follow: About what are you passionate? What would you do for your "love"?

DAY FIVE:

1. Submit paper with a reflection sheet.
2. Notes on social movements and collective behavior from sociology textbook. How do you get things done? Note the definitions of goals, tactics, and ideology.
3. What social problems do you feel strongly about? What can students do? Brainstorm together.
4. Begin in class and finish for HW. Read Civil Disobedience by Thoreau and The Wrongs of American Women. The Duty of American Women by Margaret Fuller. Be prepared to discuss both. Note the following about both: What I find interesting, amusing, or meaningful. What I understand (explain). What I do not understand (Be specific). Where I went wrong. Personal response. Put these responses in your journal.

DAY SIX:

1. Opening exercise: Play hypothetical. Students will break into pairs and be given a hypothetical community problem. They must identify the dilemma and acknowledge three ways they could deal with the problem. Determine what you deem the best way to deal with the problem and explain why. Present and discuss with the class.
2. Compare and contrast Thoreau and Fuller's responses to social issues. Which response is more effective and why? Make sure to discuss for every action there is an equal reaction.
3. What is it to be civilly disobedient? Consider historical figures that have employed Thoreau's tactics.

FINAL PROJECTS AND WRAP UP:

1. Persuasive essay to be assigned: About what would you be civilly disobedient? Students are expected to conduct research to argue their points. All material must be cited.
2. The class will construct a comprehensive community service project with the aid of the instructor on a subject of their choice. Parameters will be explored and are dependent on administrative support. EX: Students may investigate homelessness in their area. They may volunteer at the community food bank. They might create a project that helps raise community awareness. They might develop an educational slogan and once done, make a poster that advertises the slogan and encourages people to become involved in working on a solution. They might create a children's storybook that discusses the problem and could be used as an educational tool. They might create a brochure that discusses the problem and offers the name/number of an agency in this area that offers services to those suffering from this problem.