

“APPROACHING WALDEN”

CURRICULUM GUIDE
ESL / ELL
SHELTERED IMMERSION CLASSROOM
ENGLISH INSTRUCTION
GRADES: 9 – 12

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APPROACHING WALDEN

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Introduction: APPROACHING WALDEN

Transcendentalism has had a resurgence in recent years. From the ecological movement of the 1960's to the urgent environmental preservation activism of the 1990's to current habitat diversity protection, the philosophical underpinnings of transcendentalist beliefs have gained new audiences. In addition to issues of humankind's relationship to the earth, other aspects of transcendentalism have regained prominence, including political involvement which includes civil disobedience, as well as teaching models such as place-based and community based education. Individual and group spiritual / nature retreats have also earned recent popularity from transcendental roots. Eco-tourism or individual photography, poetry writing and new musical composition, all harken back to a particular era in American history. From the beginning to the middle of the 19th century up to the Civil War, transcendentalist thinking aroused the minds and hearts of people who were both caught up in the times and those who observed and critiqued events as they witnessed them. These were fertile times for the imaginations of both writers and scientists in a time of social, political, scientific and cultural ferment.

In South America and Africa, European explorers and colonialists were laying claim to vast lands and their peoples for the glory of kingdoms back home. While in America, a declining agricultural base fueled mainly by slave labor was rapidly being replaced by the process of industrialization. Cities and towns sprang up where farm fields and orchards had been. People's lives were no longer regulated by the natural rhythms of nature, but by the bells and whistles of factories and trains.

Transcendentalists lived through these changing times and were the exceptional few who rang out the clarion call of caution. Some examples of this caution might be: All progress is not necessarily good. Change for change sake may have unknown and undesirable consequences. Let us preserve our heritage of living more in harmony with nature. Let us stop and appreciate the wonder and beauty of our natural surroundings. Let us be humbled in the midst of the Divine, rather than exploiting all in nature within our grasp. The view to align ourselves as people within the circle of creation, recognizing our limits along with our abilities was not the popular current view in a time when it was man versus nature, man having dominion over nature, man overcoming the forces of nature and ultimately the total control of nature for his own purposes.

To be stewards of divine creation and to experience the “wild” without trying to harness it, is a mainstay of transcendental thought. While history reveals to us what the scientific and industrial changes brought, it seems clear to us now that the “advances” of the last century have left the world with some serious issues and new and potentially devastating consequences for all life inhabiting the planet.

If teaching and preaching to the people of the 19th century was part of the purpose of publishing and dissemination transcendentalist thought then, it is just as important for us to do so now. Therefore, the re-discovery of the great importance of the writings of Henry David Thoreau, among others, is key to the shaping of both ideology and policy for our American future. No longer can we afford to make decisions regarding the lives of our people, our animals, and our land, for we understand the global interdependence of climates, habitats, and economies. Even 150 years after its initial writing, it seems to be

of utter importance to teach a broadband of individuals, particularly the youth of our country, the core values so richly detailed in the works of the creator of Walden.

Walden Pond as a State and Heritage Park, the Walden Woods Project and the Thoreau Institute are each a positive testament to the commitment of individuals who recognize the profound value of these teachings. For us now and with the foresight of planning for future generations, “Walden Pond” will continue to mean individuality, accountability, cooperation, respect for nature, humility in the face of the Divine and the kernel of “wild” that we recognize in all sentient beings.

“We must explain to ourselves [and to our students] and understand that everything that lives is related to us.
A Man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as of his fellow men.”

Albert Schweitzer

Personal Statement: APPROACHING WALDEN

The two week seminar for high school teachers at the Walden Woods Project's Thoreau Institute in Lincoln Massachusetts during July of 2004 was a high point for me and a culminating experience in my own teacher education process. In addition to becoming certified to teach high school English, I completed a two part graduate course in curriculum development for multi-cultural, bilingual education in the classroom and ESL/ELL sheltered immersion for self contained classes as well for inclusion students. This was followed by a two week summer language camp held at Umass in Amherst for adult English language learners of greatly varying proficiency.

During the past academic year, the unit on Transcendentalism was my favorite in the Junior Honors sections. The youngsters seemed fully engaged by what they saw as current relevance of the topic, despite some difficulty they had with "archaic" or formal usage of the language. As is typical of 19th century American writers, Thoreau has numerous references to French authors of an earlier age, quotes of Latin and Greek philosophers and possible German, Teutonic or Oriental ones as well. These literary examples reflect the classical education of the day and show our author to be an erudite representative of "men of letters" of this period.

For me the opportunity to connect Nature in its original setting with a variety of subjects such as biology, geology, environmental science, foreign language, and fine arts, in addition to English was a bold step in the formation of my own approach to teaching. I am now able to see the validity of a style of learning that I thought was uniquely personal to me. It is encouraging to know that we as teachers have a way of

incorporating place based and Nature based learning in many subject areas in public school systems. “Hands – on” and “experiential” learning modalities no longer have to be the singular purview of The Steiner method, Joseph Chilton-Pierce, the Waldorf schools or Montessori school systems.

As an only child of busy working parents, I happened to have my entire childhood shaped by the many hours I spent observing the minute details of ordinary events such as ants crossing a crack in the sidewalk or nest building patterns of house wrens. While not having been raised in the country, nor having any camping and purposeful out-of-doors educational experiences, I remained continually amazed by nature as I saw it. While my love of learning grew with the proficiency I gained in the classroom as an ESL (English as a second language) learner. Observing and enjoying natural phenomenon created the framework for how I made sense of the world then, and now.

In public school structure today, much of the students’ days are spent in small chunks of time on individual subjects, often without connecting the dots between major themes in the curricula. Some modifications to school agendas in recent years have included the block style of scheduling, and “writing across the curriculum” as efforts to make the continuum of subjects more accessible and relevant to the real world. By no means are these notions universally accepted. At best, they are modifications in time allocation and enhanced writing. The very basic approach “to learn from Nature” in its rhythm and cycles, to adjust to the order of things in the natural world rather than to modify it is contrary to the current vogue. By introducing artificial products, foods and activities to youngsters and creating the media/pop culture icons as role models, the trend

away from nature has contributed greatly to the alienation young people feel in our modern day society.

While every child cannot visit a farm and learn to milk a cow to understand where milk comes from, place based education, can in fact connect a youngster to his/her immediate surroundings in personal , and real ways. In time, this personal engagement can broaden to a sense of local community. By extrapolation of this same idea, the youngster can be better prepared to take his place in the global village with a genuine feeling of connectedness to all that lives. With such a sense of belonging, that youngster may foster a sense of protection for what he has learned to care for, whether it is his vacant lot across from the school yard or the endangered indigenous person or animal thousands of miles away.

The tree which needs two arms to span its girth sprang from the tiniest
Shoot. Yon tower, nine stories high, rose from a little mound of earth.
A journey of a thousand miles began with a single step.

Lao-Tse

As I continue my own development as an inquiring person and as a teacher, I am buoyed by the concept that there is a living construct readily available to all of us. By sharing our own love of nature and guiding students to an ever more keen sense of observation, we help them to be connected to their place in the world. We offer them the tools of analysis, critical thinking and reflection on both past and present, so that they gain a sense of purpose for their own future with a goal of preservation that is, in effect self preservation for us all.

Overview ESL / ELL : APPROACHING WALDEN

Approaching Walden by using Thoreau's prolific writings may be a metaphor for an entire style of learning regardless of subject matter. The argument could be made that a comprehensive curriculum covering all major and minor subjects could be developed by studying Thoreau. This scenario however, may be viewed as rather narrow in focus. The ways and means found within the texts can and do lend themselves very well to the learner for whom English is not his/her native language. The basic principles of learning concepts apply, namely;

- ❖ Observation
- ❖ Recognition
- ❖ Comparison
- ❖ Synthesis
- ❖ Connection /fusion
- ❖ Manipulation
- ❖ Extrapolation

Sound pedagogy especially within the ESL/ELL setting includes repetition, creative expression, movement, comparison to the familiar, reinforcement and application. By using Thoreau's methods as surveyor, biologist, botanist, mathematician, philosopher and poet, the ELL student can have many options by which to acquire specific subject proficiency.

By drawing a plant from his homeland and labeling it with the native name and the English name gives the ELL student a sense of mastery even before the new learning takes place. Instead of writing about how a walk in the woods makes the student feel, he

can sing about it or make music in response to it in some other way. Instead of abstract math concepts on paper, if the student can use real world manipulatives such as pebbles, the “aha” moment of understanding may happen more quickly.

Educational literature sometimes mentions the benefit of just going outside for a change of venue to promote learning and gain creativity by allowing relaxation and aiding in the natural use of imagination often suppressed by middle school and high school. Getting out of the classroom for a while may be of extra benefit to the ELL student who faces enormous additional pressures to learn both the language and the content of several subjects in a given day. Interactions in and with Nature have so many non-verbal components which are less threatening, posing fewer difficulties for those for whom the need to be conversational may be the most difficult task of all. While Thoreau writes very descriptively on many topics both in his nature studies and in his treatises on economics and politics, he also has poems and listings that show a clear and precise way of writing which requires less vocabulary while still being explicit.

Exact sections of text yield themselves to subject areas of literature, history, philosophy, and the sciences. They can be studied in terms of vocabulary, literary style and communication. Specific scaffolding techniques may be required to give more access to the ELL student with limited scope of English. The logic of presentation and in some cases of argument in the various Thoreau texts can be highlighted as examples of grammatical structure and usage, paragraph construction and essay writing style.

It seems natural to point out to students that Thoreau was trained as a teacher and taught school. Later, while not in a formal school setting, Thoreau’s work reflects his

need to share with us his insights and wisdom regarding “right” living in harmony with Nature.

The many annotated editions of Walden among his other writings give the “Thoreau” teacher ample examples for exact subject matter as well as for learning the life style of a transcendentalist.

The easiest bridge between a student’s native culture and first language and his newly acquired one is from the natural world of plants, animals, topography, climate and family life. Thoreau talks about all of these things and more. He presents us with timeless motifs on the meaning of life and our place in society, culture and in the universe.

The purposeful way in which Thoreau documents his time during the writing of Walden is reflective of his actual mindfulness of living in the moment. The ELL student needs to gain proficiency in the English language, but by learning how to live a deliberate life he or she will learn not only to be a great student in school but a great student of life as well.

Sample classroom unit: APPROACHING WALDEN

From the book Walden, the chapter called “The Bean Field” is highlighted.

Several methods for digesting this material readily come to mind. It is suggested that the classroom teacher make modifications and adjustments based on age and grade of students, English language proficiency, urban, suburban or rural setting and culture of cooperation among various subject teachers. These suggestions may readily be used in the self contained immersion classroom

VOCABULARY: For the particular students’ age and ability, create a list of 10 – 15 vocabulary words.

1. Pre-test for understanding and usage.
2. Find the words in the text – read in context for understanding.
3. Homework to write the words and use them each in a sentence.

DISCUSSION: Talk about farming in student’s land of origin in small groups as compared to farming in the conditions and in the times of Thoreau’s life.

1. Make a list of the similarities and differences of ways of farm life then and now, in the country of birth and in America. Discuss in small groups and present lists to the whole class.
2. Talk about the tools of the farmer, the number of hours worked, the profit to be made (if any), the kinds of labor involved from planning, designing the field, to ordering the seed, planting, weeding, harvesting, record keeping, etc.

MATH APPLICATION: Using the text and making analogies and conversions addition, multiplication, square root and division ideas come to mind.

1. Convert the acreage to hectares
2. Convert the prices given for the 1800's to today's values
3. Draw the geometrical shape of the fields
4. Measure the rows
5. Discuss straight rows and their measurements versus curving ones
6. By reading the text carefully, find other examples where math fits in e.g., probability theory of what percentage of the number of beans planted will mature to produce beans? Find other examples in cooperative team setting.

SCIENCE: Botany and Biology are apparent, but other scientific subjects may arise such as weather, climate, and astronomy among others

1. Have students identify and label the type of bean or beans Thoreau cultivated.
2. Find out about the natural enemies of this plant.
3. Learn about the weather, temperature, and rain and soil conditions needed for optimal yield of these bean fields?
4. Learn what plants are complimentary to the bean and which "fight" for the same nutrients in the soil.
5. Plant some beans and tend them in individual pots or on a larger scale on the school property or in a community garden.
6. Make a long-term project and document the results of cooperative farming with tasks divided among the students. Keep a farm science journal.

ART/MUSIC: Much creativity is opened up in these modalities. Let your own imagination as teacher be your guide. Some suggestions:

1. Make a large 3-D poster of various beans using a variety of materials using household supplies
2. Write some poems about the beauty of nature and about planting and harvesting, make them into songs and record them with nature sounds
3. Write a “haiku” about the bean
4. Make a jig saw puzzle using blow up photos of beans from magazines or the internet
5. Research some jewelry people have made from beans and in what countries (possibly Native Americans)
6. Make some bracelets or necklaces from beans and document your creation in a step by step instructional manual.
7. Make costume or masks with the bean theme
8. Create “bean” figures and write a puppet show featuring the life and hard times of the “bean characters” The whole class can participate in this without a lot of English proficiency.
9. Make a documentary film on the growing of your own class bean field.

ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Reading and re-reading the text will be a richly rewarding experience if the teacher reads aloud, students read in turn out loud and if content understanding is checked in increments. Frequent stops to measure comprehension with short answer “fill in the blank” sentences or an open book test to

find certain passages may be useful. Writing exercises can be designed as compositions with prompts such as: (write a 5 paragraph essay on...)

- I am a farmer and on a typical day I
- I had the most amazing dream in which I became a bean eating bug and I lived in Thoreau's bean field...
- I am the train conductor and our train is being loaded with bushels and bushels of beans from the local harvest, when suddenly...
- All the money in our treasury is gone and our people are using beans as a means of monetary exchange. Describe our society based on bean money...
- If cultivating beans is a metaphor for work, what is leisure?

Applications and uses of the Walden text among the many writings of Thoreau have myriad uses. Massachusetts Frameworks require relevancy to particular aspects of each subject area to be mastered. In the ELL sheltered immersion classroom, specific standards have not been created in as much detail as in English for example. If the teacher is following the curriculum outlined by a particular school district, adherence to the standards/ strands must be identified and practiced. As shown by the above examples, Thoreau's work in particular is very flexible in this regard.

Objective: APPROACHING WALDEN

By taking a close reading of a few pages of Walden, a unit of instruction can be readily modified for the ELL classroom or used as a tutorial for the inclusion student.

1. As a result of this comprehensive Thoreau unit, the student will master 10 -15 new vocabulary words in terms of their spelling, meaning and usage.
2. At the conclusion of this unit, the student will be able to write a paragraph in the style of Walden focusing on a particular narrow topic.
3. As a result of careful detective work looking for clues in the particular section of Walden being studied, the student will be able to make math computations as related in the text with a verbal explanation of their meaning.
4. After reflecting on the reading, the student will be able to draw comparisons of other events in American history that occurred in the mid-19th century.
5. The student will be able to converse about similarities and differences between ways of doing things in his native culture and his newly adopted one as relating to the text.
6. The ELL student, as a result of digesting this one section of Walden may make an art project or a scientific diagram based on the text.

Using the analogy of the real life events described in this section of Walden, the student will gain reinforcement in precision: accuracy in spelling, grammar, calculations and design. The student will make the connection between his/her study practices and successful outcome of the project. By internalizing the deliberative style and practice of the author, the student will gain long term success strategies for learning.

Conclusion: APPROACHING WALDEN

In summary, utilizing transcendentalist writings could fulfill all the learning requirements for well rounded students in today's classrooms and prepare them with a world view of honor, respect, a reverence for the Divine, along with practical skills of survival, including trade skills in surveying, carpentry, animal husbandry, farming, political debate and self governance in a democratic society. Most importantly, our students could acquire the ability to understand and enjoy the "wild", the very essence of their nature as innocent, curious and without guile. The wild that is both within and without each of us and all of us on the planet is, in actuality more than a school curriculum. It is the hallmark of the important lessons of Life.

Henry David Thoreau's approach to Nature is infectious. To walk in his footsteps in Walden Woods, to observe "his" trees, frogs and birds is to appreciate the life giving forces that allow us to be here and to pause and give thanks for the opportunity we have in teaching others. We are able to bring that appreciation as an offering and enrichment to any students with whom we have contact.

For the ELL student in a sheltered or total immersion class, Thoreau serves both as metaphor for learning processes and studies and as real example of writings which educate, and enlighten broadly. The examples mentioned above in the sample unit are in correlation with the basic tenets of transcendentalism as a philosophy and way of life. While it was new in the mid 1900's, it is all new for us again.

As we incorporate more and more new immigrants into the American way of life, it is refreshing to know that we do not have to homogenize all their experiences into the

pop culture of the current mode. In fact, our history and literature offers an array of outstanding individuals who exemplify alternate ways of living, thinking and thriving from their particular place in history.

Thoreau offers us a rich menu full of variety and substance that is as fresh today 150 years after its first printing as when ink and nib were first put to paper. The digital generation has a great deal to learn from Thoreau and we are lucky to have that road of learning paved with many texts on several subjects. Thoreau may have been an unusual renaissance man in his day, but today's and tomorrow's youth also have to assimilate a wide expanse of knowledge in order to be productive in the 21st century. The ELL student may be particularly aided in his/her English /Language Arts proficiency by concentrating on this study in its depth and breadth. The scope of transcendentalism is as wide as the imagination of its reader.

APPENDIX:

“I hear America Singing” pages 1-5

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ihas/poet/Thoreau.html>

reference to musical composition by Charles Ives based on Thoreau’s words

“The Thoreau Reader” The works of Henry D. Thoreau, 1817- 1862

pages 1-2

<http://eserver.org/Thoreau>