

NEH Landmarks Living Deliberately Lesson Plans

Thread: Living in Nature

Grade Level: 4th (can easily be modified for 5th-8th grades)

Teacher: Rosemary Barilla; Austin, TX

Objectives:

- Students will be able to comprehend and analyze selections of text through annotation, dialogue and written response.
- Students will be able to observe the natural world and record observations through both “scientist’s eyes” and “poet’s eyes”.
- Students will be able to draft and revise for clarity and craft to compose poems based on their natural world observations.

Materials:

- Passages and excerpts selected from *Walden* (teacher self-selected to best meet the needs of students)
- Samples of poems describing nature and objects in nature (these lessons utilize Valerie Worth’s *All the Small Poems and Fourteen More*)
- Student writer’s notebooks
- Ziploc baggies with pre-selected items within representing both natural items and manmade (ie. pebble, leaf, twig, shell, safety pin, pen, rubber band, penny, etc)
- Outdoor space to observe and write in. (If this is unavailable, students can bring in natural objects to observe and write about)
- Optional: handheld magnifying glasses, tape measures

Framing Questions:

- What skills and choices do we need to become keen observers of nature? How can you use your physical body, senses, and tools to observe? How can you use time, reflection, and silence to observe?
- What new things did you notice today? How did that add to your understanding of the things you noticed?
- How can you look at the natural world with both “scientist eyes” and “poet’s eyes?” How do these perspectives enhance your writing craft skills? How do these perspectives enhance your understanding of the natural world around you?
- How do your observations of the natural world deepen your appreciation for how you engage and care for the natural world?

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills: ELA/Reading Grade :

2.6 The student uses metacognitive skills to both develop and deepen comprehension of increasingly complex texts.

3.7: The student responds to an increasingly challenging variety of sources that are read, heard or viewed.

4.8: The students recognizes and analyzes genre specific characteristics, structures, and purposes within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse texts.

5.10: The student uses critical inquiry to analyze the author’s choices and how they influence and communicate meaning within a variety of texts. The student analyzes and applies author’s craft purposefully in order to develop his/her own products.

6.11 and 6.12: The student uses genre characteristics and craft to compose multiple texts that are meaningful. The student uses the writing process recursively.

Lesson One: Seeing the Natural World with both “Scientist’s Eyes” and “Poet’s Eyes”

Time Needed (two sessions, approx 45 min each)

Session One Procedure:

1. Provide students with a Ziploc baggie with a mix of about 5-6 everyday common objects (both natural and manmade), making sure to include a safety pin and a pebble in the mix.
2. Project (or provide an individual copy) Valerie Worth’s poem, *Safety Pin*, making sure to remove the title. Read the poem aloud.
3. Guide students to find an object in the baggie that matches the poem, and then ask what lines in the poem helped them know.
4. Discuss with students Worth’s language choice in describing the safety pin in “poetic” and figurative ways rather than only the physical description.
5. Tell students we will be looking at a natural object in a very scientific and physical way, noticing the smallest of details that makes your pebble unique and different than anybody else’s. We will then turn on our “poet eyes” to relook at the object, just like Valerie Worth has done. Emphasize that we can look at the world around us in various ways, and each way provides us with a unique and valuable perspective.
6. Have students examine the pebble in their bag (you might also opt for students to bring in their very own pebble for this assignment). In their notebooks, make a T chart on the left side labeled “physical observations” and on the right side, “poet’s observations.” Allow students time to collect physical observations first, noting size, color, shape, texture, etc. Consider providing magnifying glasses and/or tape measures as tools to help make observations. Encourage them to be as specific as possible (model if needed).
7. After students have collected physical descriptions only, have all students come together in a group (or divide class in half, or three larger groups) and place their pebble in the middle in a pile. The pile should then be mixed up, and then have one person lay out each pebble in a row so they can be seen easily by everyone in the group.
8. Each student reads his/her physical description of his/her pebble and peers try to locate and identify the reader’s pebble based on the physical description. Students should keep their own pebble for tomorrow’s lesson (collect baggies, adding student names to bag).
9. Debrief as a whole class, asking students to reflect on the pebble assignment aloud. Emphasize how very concrete and specific language can help to determine which pebble is being described, and how scientists use these concrete observations to learn through observation. Conclude by introducing the following question from Walden: “Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer?”

Lesson One: Seeing the Natural World with both “Scientist’s Eyes” and “Poet’s Eyes”

Time Needed (two sessions, approx 45 min each)

Session Two Procedure:

1. Start today’s sessions revisiting the question, “Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer?” Tell students yesterday we saw as a scientist, observing the natural object of a pebble and practicing specificity in our descriptions and using many of our senses and even some tools to collect these observations. Today, we will focus on describing using “poet’s eyes.”
2. Revisit Valerie Worth’s Safety Pin poem, reading aloud and discussing poetic elements Worth uses to capture the imagery of the safety pin. Provide students with copies of Worth’s other poems (Cricket, Beetle, Spider, & Sparrow have been included for this lesson). Read aloud each, and ask students to mark where they see Worth using “poet’s eyes” to describe and write about the natural object, and where she is using “scientist’s eyes.” Students can turn and talk with a partner to describe their findings and noticing regarding Worth’s use of language. Discuss findings as a whole group, and use appropriate terminology for your students based on their observations to name simile, imagery, metaphor, etc without turning the lesson into poetic terminology discussion!
3. Tell students they will now revisit their pebble (hand out same pebbles from earlier lesson) using their “poet’s eyes” and revisiting their pebble through this lens. Encourage students to use comparisons (similes) and think of new ways to describe what their pebble might feel like, represent or symbolize in the natural world. Student descriptions should be written in their writer’s notebook T chart from yesterday. Provide a model to get them started if needed (or use an exemplar line from Worth’s poems, previous 4th grade student samples are also included).
4. Allow students time to turn and talk, or confer with small groups as they work through collecting new “poetic” descriptions of their pebbles.
5. When students have a collection of observations as poets, allow them time to draft a poem using Worth’s poems as mentor texts for how to organize (enjambement, stanzas, punctuation, etc) They can include both observations made from yesterday’s lesson as a “scientist” and new observations as a “poet” to compose their drafts.
6. Allow time for revising and including any specific writing craft lessons as needed to complete the drafting and revising phases of this writing. Allow time for sharing and publishing of the pebble poems, and consider displaying completed poems with the actual physical pebble affixed to the student poem.

Lesson Two: Writing In Nature

Time Needed (two sessions, approx 45 min each)

Session One Procedure:

Note: Consider holding this lesson outside to prepare students for the second half of the lesson.

1. Pass out passage excerpts from Walden, and remind students of our guiding question from earlier: “Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer?” Tell students they will read observations made by the writer Thoreau and annotate their noticings as they read. Provide any additional thinking prompts depending on student experience with annotating.
2. Allow students to share their annotations in small groups, and encourage them to discuss in what ways Thoreau uses both “scientist’s eyes” and “poet’s eyes” in his writing, just as Worth does in her poems.
3. Provide another set of selected excerpts from Walden that illustrate the lesson with students self-selecting a pre-selected passage (or consider another text depending on the age and level of students).
4. Allow students to sketch a visual to accompany their annotations that captures the “seer” aspect of their readings.

Session Two Procedure:

Note : This session should be held outdoors where students can have a place to sit, observe, write and reflect. Depending on the needs of students, prepare them ahead of time and make sure expectations are set to maximize the lesson time outside.

1. Tell students they will be using their senses, time, note taking, reflection and silence to be keen observers of the natural world. Each student will find a location outside to observe and collect everything heard, seen, felt, etc during a 10 minute period in one location, and then 10 additional minutes in a new location (adjust this time according to the needs of students).
2. Students can use whatever style of note collecting works, and should consider using the T chart method labeled as “scientist” and “poet” eyes used earlier in lesson one.
3. After 20 minutes of observation, gather the whole class to debrief. Ask what was surprising? Difficult? Enjoyable? What new appreciations about the natural world might you have after your observation/reflection time?
4. Allow students time to compose poems or prose based on these observations (include another session for drafting, revising as needed). Encourage the use of mentor texts from Walden excerpts and Worth’s poems for craft models. To extend student response, consider allowing students to photograph and/or illustrate their writing.

Valerie Worth's poems used for these lessons (there are 40+ to choose from in her book!)

Safety Pin

Closed, it sleeps
on its side
Quietly,
The silver image
of some
small fish;

Opened, it snaps
Its tail out
Like a thin
Shrimp, and looks
At the sharp
point with a
surprised eye.

SPIDER

The spider weaves it,
Swinging and switching
Her thread, running it
Round its frame,
Closing the last flat
Spaces in, to wait out
Her purpose of flies;

But at dawn, when
It hangs spangled
With silver water, frail
Crystals of wet light
Caught so neatly and
Needlessly, it is not
Her web, but ours.



beetle

As in old
Mummy-times,
The scarab
Beetle keeps
Its precious
Innards
Packed in
A lacquered
Coffer of
Curious
Compartments.



Crickets, Valerie Worth

Crickets

Talk

In the tall

Grass

All

Late summer

Long.

When

Summer

Is gone,

The dry

Grass

Whispers

Alone.



sparrow

Nothing is less
Rare than
One dust-
Colored sparrow
In a driveway
Minding her own
Matters, pottering
Carelessly, finding
Seeds in the tire-
Flattened weeds:
But because
She can dare
To let us watch her
There, when all
The stately robins
Have fled
Scolding into
The air, she
Is as good a bird
As anyone needs.



4th grade Student Samples that include descriptions as both a “scientist” and as a “poet.”

Pebble

By, Charlotte L, 4th grade

As you
look upon the many
pebbles,
you see one that almost seems
to speak to
you.

The color is
like the
the blood orange sun
rising in the east.
it is shaped like a ring,
sparkling,
In the sun.

My Pebble Poem

By, Evey F., 4th grade

My pebble
is in the shape
of an oval.

It has one
or two broken
spots.

My pebble is
about one inch
Long.

It is a gray
pebble with
scratches
all over it like
a rusty
Pick-up truck.

My pebble is a
very unique
pebble.

Pebble

By, Henry M, 4th grade

Pebbles are
Sunken ships

Unable to
Move

Paralyzed-
Stuck-

On our
Wide
World

Pebble

By, Gavin G, 4th grade

One pebble,
waiting just
for you, red,
brown, with
crystal veins.
Hidden some-
where where only
you can
find it;
it will
wait 'til
you find it.

Walden Text Excerpts:
(select appropriate excerpts for student needs)

“Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer?”

“As I sit at my window this summer afternoon, hawks are circling about my clearing; the tantivy of wild pigeons, flying by twos and threes athwart my view, or perching restless on the white pine boughs behind my house, gives a voice to the air; a fish hawk dimples the glassy surface of the pond and brings up a fish; a mink steals out of the marsh before my door and seizes a frog by the shore...”

“...I have returned to the woods, and, partly with a view to the next day’s dinner, spent the hours of midnight fishing from a boat by moonlight, serenaded by owls and foxes, and hearing, from time to time, the creaking note of some unknown bird close at hand. These experiences were very memorable and valuable to me,--- anchored in forty feet of water, and twenty or thirty rods from the shore, surrounded sometimes by thousands of small perch and shiners, dimpling the surface with their tails in the moonlight, and communicating by a long flaxen line with mysterious nocturnal fishes which had their dwelling forty feet below, or sometimes dragging sixty feet of line about the pond as I drifted in the gentle night breeze, now and then feeling a feeling a slight vibration along it, indicative of some life prowling about its extremity...”

“The shore is composed of a belt of smooth rounded white stones like paving-stones, excepting one or two short sand beaches, and is so steep that in many places a single leap will carry you into water over your head; and were it not for its remarkable transparency, that would be the last to be seen of its bottom till it rose on the opposite side. Some think it is bottomless. It is nowhere muddy, and a casual observer would say that there were no weeds at all in it...”

“Meanwhile also came the chickadees in flocks, which, picking up the crumbs the squirrels had dropped, flew to the nearest twig and, placing them under their claws, hammered away at them with their little bills, as if it were an insect in the bark, till they were sufficiently reduced for their slender throats. A little flock of these titmice came daily to pick a dinner out of my wood-pile, or the crumbs at my door, with faint flitting lispings notes, like the tinkling of icicles in the grass, or else with sprightly *day day day*, or more rarely, in springlike days, a wiry summery *phe-be* from the woodside.”