

Clara Defilippis
Thoreau Thread
His Relationship with Nature

Overarching Question: How can our experience of Nature's wonders help us be better versions of our true human nature?

Quotes:

1. All change is a miracle to contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant. (Waldon; Economy)
2. It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessities of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them. (Waldon; Economy)
The necessities of life for man in this climate may, accurately enough, be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel. (Waldon; Economy)
3. So many autumn, ay, and winter days, spent outside town, trying to hear what was in the wind, to hear and carry it express! (Waldon; Economy)
4. It would be well, perhaps, if we were to spend more of our days and nights without any obstruction between us and the celestial bodies, if the poet did not speak so much from under a roof, or the saint dwell there so long. Birds do not sing in caves, nor do doves cherish their innocence in dovecots. (Waldon; Economy)
5. They were pleasant spring days, in which the winter of man's discontent was thawing as well as the earth, and the life that had lain torpid began to stretch itself. (Waldon; Economy)
6. Before I had done I was more the friend than the foe of the pine tree, though I had cut down some of them, having become better acquainted with it. (Waldon; Economy)
7. There is some of the same fitness in a man's building his own house that there is in a bird's building its own nest. (Waldon; Economy)
8. The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it. (Waldon; Where I lived, and What I lived for.)
9. This small lake was of most value as a neighbor... (Waldon; Where I Lived, and What I Lived For.)
10. Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with nature herself. (Waldon; Where I Lived, and What I Lived For.)
11. Sometimes, on Sundays, I heard the bells, the Lincoln, Acton, Bedford, or Concord bell, when the wind was favorable, a faint, sweet, and, as it were, natural melody, worth importing into the wilderness. (Waldon; Sounds)
12. I am convinced, that if all men were to live as simply as I then did, thieving and robbery would be unknown. (Waldon; The Village)
13. I was surprised to hear him express wonder at any of Nature's operations, for I thought that there were no secrets between them. (Waldon; Spring)
14. When I see on the one side the inert bank - for the sun acts on one side first - and on the other this luxuriant foliage, the creation of an hour, I am affected as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and me... (Waldon; Spring)
15. Thus it seemed that this one hillside illustrated the principle of all the operations of Nature. The Maker of this earth but patented a leaf. (Waldon; Spring)
16. The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree... (Waldon; Spring)
17. In almost all climes the tortoise and the frog are among the precursors and heralds of this season, and birds fly with song and glancing plumage, and plants spring and bloom, and

winds blow, to correct this slight oscillation of the poles and preserve the equilibrium of nature. (Waldon; Spring)

18. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature. (Waldon; Spring)

19. I flouted along under the spell of enchantment, as if I had been transported to an heroic age, and breathed an atmosphere of chivalry. (Walking)

20. The most alive is the wildest. (Walking)

21. There is a keen enjoyment in a mere animal existence. (Walking)

22. While there are manners and compliments we do not meet, we do not teach one another the lessons of honesty and sincerity that the brutes do, or of steadiness and solidity that the rocks do. (Life Without Principle)

23. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man. (Civil Disobedience)

24. I cannot expect, like Orpheus, to change the nature of the rocks and trees and beasts. (Civil Disobedience)

25. When I reflect to what a cause this man devoted himself, and how religiously, and then reflect to what cause his judges and all who condemn him so angrily and fluently devote themselves, I see that they are as far apart as the heavens and earth are asunder. (A Plea for Captain John Brown)

26. But it chanced the other day that I scented a white water-lily, and a season I had waited for had arrived. It is the emblem of purity. It bursts up so pure and fair to the eye, and so sweet to the scent, as if to show us what purity and sweetness reside in, and can be extracted from, the slime and much of the earth. (Slavery in Massachusetts)

Questions:

1. What kinds of changes is Thoreau wishing to contemplate?

How can you contemplate something which is always changing?

What does he consider a miracle within nature?

2. Why is it so important to live with only what is absolutely necessary for survival?

Is learning and following these methods truly elevate man above the beasts or lower his potential for greater intellectual thought?

3. What does nature have to teach us?

Does the wind whisper of higher truths? What are these truths? Thoreau mentions that he tries to hear the message in the wind, but does he succeed?

4. What is it about the celestial bodies that leads one to truth? Is the roof and dwelling literally or figuratively meant? If figurative, how can we create an environment in which we can sing like the birds? Why is it important that we have the ability to sing like the birds?

5. Is spring in nature a metaphor for the human spirit? How can we begin to stretch and thaw?

6. How can we become friends with nature? Does nature, like men, reciprocate?

7. Is man's actions and artistry similar to nature or in opposition?

8. How can we hear the poetry in nature? Is the poetry in nature intrinsic to nature or an attribute of the creator present in nature?

9. Thoreau wishes to be separate from men, but still needs companionship. What kind of companionship can nature give? Is it modelled after the relationship between men or is it a separate kind of neighborliness?

10. How does Nature provide an invitation? What final end is Nature, personified, wishing to achieve through encouraging man to reach for innocence and simplicity?

11. What makes certain man-made sounds in keeping with nature while others in opposition?

12. Is man's nature without corruption? If placed in nature without any human contact would his life be similar to a paradise?
13. How can we cultivate a wonder in nature even in students who have a great deal of knowledge about science?
14. Who is the Artist? What benefit do we gain by seeing the inner workings of nature and its purpose?
15. Why is it necessary to see all of Nature's principles of operation at once? What is the significance of seeing the world as a metaphor for a leaf?
16. Why is nature a living poetry? What is beautiful about poetry that is also in nature? If man must conform his mind and person to nature, why is Thoreau comparing nature to man-made art of poetry?
17. What is the equilibrium of nature? Is it in relation to conservation and ecology or something deeper?
18. If we cannot find the final answers in nature, why do we search within it for truth? Why can we not have enough of nature?
19. How is walking in nature like a pilgrimage? What is the final destination? What kind of chivalry is good when exercised outside of human contact?
20. What does it mean to be wild? Does it mean anarchy or hunter/gatherer society?
21. What is an animal existence and why do we feel an enjoyment in going out into the wild?
22. How can nature teach humans virtue?
23. What are the natural laws of plants? How do they related to humans?
24. What is the nature of the physical world? Is nature what the object yearns for or is it meant for or is ruled by?
25. If the heavens and earth are as separate as good and evil, how can nature lead us to transcendental realities?
26. How can we extract purity and sweetness from nature in the mists of living in evil, ugliness, and disorder?

Thoreau and Nature: Lesson Plans for 3rd -5th grade students

Unit Overview

Henry David Thoreau recognized that humans were losing touch with nature and its truths. He wished to come to a greater appreciation for nature, the fruit of his own labor, and the feeling of accomplishment gained through living in the wildness. In studying his life, students will gain a new appreciation for the laws of nature and the incredible benefits of humans when living in wildness. Students will also learn how joy and happiness are not just about what you possess but also the enjoyment you experience in the world around you. Students will study Thoreau's life at Walden Pond, examine nature with a sense of wonder, and then discuss how nature can provide happiness and greater contentment.

Main Objectives

1) Learn about the necessary steps Thoreau took to live at Walden Pond 2) Experience the wonder he enjoyed when witnessing Nature's miracles. 3) Discuss what is wonder in Nature and why it is important for students to possess this attribute?

Overarching Unit Questions

1) Why is it interesting to learn about something that does not necessarily give you practical knowledge? 2) What is beautiful, musical, poetic about nature? 3) What truths about ourselves and nature do we receive by showing joy in Nature's miracles?

Reminder: Before beginning the lessons, teachers will need to have purchased beans and placed them for a few days before the lesson in a damp plastic bag in order to sprout the beans so that they have their seedling leaves growing within the bean seed by day three.

Extra Resources for Teachers

Henry David Thoreau for Kids: His Life and Ideas, with 21 Activities (For Kids series) by Corinne Hosfeld Smith; ISBN: 978-1613731468

If You Spent a Day with Thoreau at Walden Pond (Christy Ottaviano Books) by Robert Burleigh; ISBN: 978-0805091373

A Year in the Woods by Henry David Thoreau and Illustrated by Giovanni Manna; ISBN: 978-1568463056

Henry David's House by Steven Schnur; ISBN: 978-0881061178

A Mind with Wings: The Story of Henry David Thoreau by Gerald and Loretta Hausman; ISBN: 978-1590302286

Lesson Outline

Day 1: Henry David Thoreau and his time at Walden Pond

Day 2: Experiencing Wonder in Nature

Day 3: The Benefits of a Sense of Wonder

Suggested additional activities for extended lessons

1. Read some of the additional suggested children's books on Thoreau's life and experiences.
2. Read as a class *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George; discuss the character's reasons for living in nature and what he gains through the experience.
3. Obtain caterpillars and sketch their progress through their metamorphosis into butterflies.
4. Plant corn and bean seeds and see them grow overtime, sketching their progress. ("Tops" Unit)
5. Have students collect different interesting rocks and bring them in for show and tell.
6. Take a field trip to a farm, zoo, or garden.
7. Organize a hike on a weekend that students and their parents can participate in outside of the school day.
8. Have a specialist come in and discuss the amazing aspects of the natural world.
9. Keep living plants and animals in your classroom for students to observe and enjoy.

Day 1: Henry David Thoreau and Walden Pond

Lesson Overview

In this lesson we cover how Henry David Thoreau survived on Walden Pond. Previously students may have experienced camping and know that individuals lived in the past more simply and with less technology than now. In the future students will examine the wonders of nature through video, sound, and a hands-on activity.

Materials

- *If You Spent a Day with Thoreau at Walden Pond* (Christy Ottaviano Books) by Robert Burleigh; ISBN: 978-0805091373
- *A Year in the Woods* by Henry David Thoreau and Illustrated by Giovanni Manna; ISBN: 978-1568463056
- Information about Henry David Thoreau's life

Guiding Socratic Question

Why did Henry David Thoreau wish to go out and live in nature?

Main Objectives

Learn about Henry David Thoreau's steps to live on Walden Pond.

Identify where Walden Pond is in the United States.

Discuss why Henry David Thoreau would wish to live alone on Walden Pond.

Bell Work/Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Ask students if they have ever been camping. Allow a few students to explain what they liked about camping and what was difficult. If no one has been camping, discuss what it was like to have the power out or when they went on a picnic in the park.

Presentation (20 minutes)

Read a picture book under a document camera about Henry David Thoreau and his decision to live in the woods near Walden Pond. Tell the students about Henry David Thoreau's life and his love of nature.

Guided Discussion (10 minutes)

Discuss with the students what Walden Pond meant to Thoreau and ask them why they think he made this decision to live outside of his town in the wildness and a simple life. Have them come to see his belief that nature teaches universal truths about yourself and the world.

Student Practice and Closure (10 minutes)

Have students write a short reflection on where their Walden Pond is in their life and why.

Day 1: The Wonder of Nature

Lesson Overview

In this lesson we cover the beauty of nature using multiple senses. Previously students have recognized Henry David Thoreau's love of nature and his desire to live within nature to gain perspective. In the future students will analyze how exposure to nature helps them.

Materials

- Nature pictures
- audio of water running and birds chirping
- video of bees on flowers
- flower scents or perfume (if allergies permit)
- Some kind of hands on nature (rocks, pinecones, leaves etc.)

Guiding Socratic Question

What is beautiful about the nature?

Main Objectives

Gain awareness of beauty in nature

Express in words what one enjoys about using your senses to observe nature

Come to an appreciation for the landscape in a student's own area

Bell Work/Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Discuss what students enjoy about their home, backyard or some place they love to go in their area.

Presentation and Discussion (30 minutes)

- Examine pictures of nature and discuss what is beautiful about those images.
- Smell a beautiful scent with eyes closed and discuss how it makes you feel and why it is beautiful.

- Listen to a river running and/or birds chirping. Discuss how nature has its own form of music and why.
- Hand out a physical object from nature such as rocks or leaves. Have students discuss what they find beautiful about the feeling of these objects.
- Watch a video of a bee collecting nectar from flower to flower or another similar nature video (without commentary); Discuss what is beautiful about creatures' activities. If time permits, talk about how the bee is a metaphor for man and why.

Closure (10 minutes)

Have students write about why they believe that nature is beautiful, musical, and poetical. Students can share their ideas with the class after writing if time permits.

Day 3: Nature's Effect on Humans

Lesson Overview

In this lesson we cover how an enjoyment and wonder in nature aids humans and gives them joy. In addition, student will recognize that humans are worthy of the same examination since they also are within nature and our living things. Previously students learned about Henry David Thoreau's love of nature and desire to live surrounded by nature. They also discussed how they noticed beauty in the natural world through their different senses. In the future students will individually recognize the beauty around them during their daily life.

Materials

- Sprouted beans
- Poem "The Ways of Living Things" by Jack Prelutsky

Guiding Socratic Question

How does an appreciation and wonder in living things in nature and within our world bring us joy and fulfillment?

Main Objectives

Understand what is wonder in the world

Examine how we feel when filled with wonder and how it is beneficial

Identify how we can experience this wonder in our daily lives no matter our surroundings

Bell Work/Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Discuss parts of nature that are present in the student's lives that they have access to. Weather is a great natural experience that students within cities experience.

Presentation and Discussion (15 minutes)

Hand out a sprouted bean and a dry bean to every child in the classroom. Examine the sprouted bean and describe what you see that is different about the two different beans from the outside. Then have students gently open the soaked bean to see the embryo leaves within. Explain what has happened and express wonder in how water has the ability to produce life from a dry rock-like substance.

Guided Discussion (15 minutes)

Discuss how examining the beans made the students feel. Ensure that students know that they are sharing positive feedback. Discuss how students could look at their classroom or room at home the same way. Examine as a class how the world around us can provide joy including witnessing the smile of a classmate or an ant crawling outside on the playground.

Student Practice (10 minutes)

Have students write about what they can observe around them in their daily lives that could potentially give them joy. Express the fact that they need to choose something other than a screen or device.

Closure

Read to the students the “Ways of Living Things” Poem