

Christopher Donovan

Henry David Thoreau - Curriculum Unit

Unit Objectives:

This unit is designed for students in grade 11 American Literature and will last roughly 2 weeks.

By the end of this time, students will be able to:

- Evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text (“Civil Disobedience”).
- Analyze how two texts address similar themes (“CD” and modern speech/interview).
- Craft a relevant thesis statement.
- Annotate poetry and essays from various Transcendentalists.
- Make connections between 19th Century Transcendentalists and modern society.

The unit will begin with a heavy focus on Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience”.

Students will read the text on their own but complete several formative assessments during class to gain a deeper understanding. The summative assessment of this part of the unit will be to write a complete thesis statement for a potential argument essay.

As the unit moves on, students will work in groups to develop a broader understanding of a specific Transcendentalist and their writing. The summative assessments at the conclusion of this section will be a “Transcendental Mind Map” and to begin the body paragraphs for the in-class essay.

This unit has been broken into eight lessons and will examine several threads, but the focus is:

- Choosing Life with Principle
- Living in Society
- Being Awake, Aware and Alive
- Hearing that Different Drummer

MA Standards:

- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in an exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, coherent, convincing, and engaging.
- Analyze pre-twentieth-century documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes and rhetorical features.
- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study;
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing and speaking; retain and further develop language skills learned in previous grades.
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Materials:

- Copies of “[Civil Disobedience](#)”
- Chromebooks
- Highlighters
- Pens
- Poster paper
- “Evaluating the Evidence” templates

Essential Questions:

- In what situations should consequence become more important than acknowledging law?
- Has society’s definition of Civil Disobedience changed since the 19th century?
- Does Civil Disobedience promote social progress?
- Is it possible to live simply in today’s society?
- What lasting impact did the Transcendentalists have on our society?

Lesson One:

- Class will watch video on Henry David Thoreau and Civil Disobedience.
[Thoreau and CD](#)
 - Students had two nights to read and annotate “Civil Disobedience”. The video will help to clarify misconceptions and promote discussion.
 - Students should have read the text using the left/right strategy. As they read, students focus on writing synonyms for key words on the left side, and listing rhetorical strategies on the right.
- Class will complete a concentric circle discussion on the assigned reading.
 - Students form two circles - one inside and one outside. Each student on the inside is paired with a student on the outside; they face each other. The teacher poses a question to the whole group and pairs discuss their responses with each other. Then the teacher signals students to rotate: Students on the outside circle move one space to the right so they are standing in front of a new person. Now the teacher poses a new question, and the process is repeated.
 - The questions asked in this activity will focus on the message Thoreau wished to convey in his lecture.
 - Why might the word civil be in the title?
 - What does Thoreau believe is the best type of government?
 - Is Thoreau judging people on authority?
 - Should we be forced to pay taxes to support other people’s needs?

Lesson Two:

- Working in groups, students will complete “SOAPSTONE” activity on “Civil Disobedience”.
 - Students work together to identify speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, subject, tone. They will provide textual evidence (direct quote or paraphrase) for each example and organize on a poster.
 - Class will complete a gallery viewing of posters and discuss commonalities.

Lesson Three:

- Students will work in groups to read or watch, discuss and take notes on one of the following:
 - ”Don’t Take the Bait” speech
 - [The Squad's response to President Trump's tweets](#)
 - Colin Kaepernick interview transcript
 - [Colin Kaepernick's comments about the National Anthem](#)
 - Kentucky Clerk Kim Davis interviews
 - [Kim Davis defends denying same-sex marriage licenses](#)
 - [Kim Davis continues to defend her choice](#)
 - Mayor Mitch Landrieu speech
 - [New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu addresses removal of Confederate statues](#)

Lesson Four:

- Students will work in their groups to “evaluate the evidence” of their assigned modern example.
 - Students have choice (follows Universal Design for Learning model) on how they wish to present their evidence, but they should:
 - name their example
 - give an explanation of it
 - make a connection to the original text
 - provide analysis

Lesson Five:

- Students will compose a thesis statement based on the following essay question:
 - Compose a thesis statement you might use for an essay arguing your position on whether disobedience is a valuable human trait that promotes social progress. Use appropriate examples from your reading, experience or observations to support your argument. (Modified from 2016 AP Language & Composition, #3)
- Students will work in pairs to provide constructive criticism to another thesis statement. Then, they should rewrite using the suggestions they get.

Lesson Six:

- Working in groups, students will be assigned one of the following Transcendentalists:
 - Group 1 - Ralph Waldo Emerson
 - Group 2 - Henry David Thoreau
 - Group 3 - Margaret Fuller
 - Group 4 - Bronson Alcott
 - Group 5 - Ellery Channing
- Groups will spend the class learning biographical information and discovering some texts for their assigned author, and should be prepared to share out.

Lesson Seven:**(two classes)**

- Groups will continue to work on their “Transcendental Mind Map”, with the following in mind:
 - Virtues and Vices -- What are your author's most admirable qualities? His/her worst? How can you make us visualize them? Be appropriate. Include at least 1 relevant quote! 15 pts
 - Living Deliberately - In what ways did your author live deliberately? Be creative in your explanation. 25 pts
 - Musical Selection -- Choose a song (can be contemporary) that relates to your author and his/her beliefs. Find a way to explain why! 15 pts
 - Peaks and Valleys -- Identify the high and low points of your author's life, and determine the causes and effects (mental distress, drastic measures?) of these peaks and valleys. Include at least 1 relevant quote! 15 pts
 - Poetry -- Read two poems by your author and summarize as a group. I should receive a copy of each (Attached to Mind Map) with handwritten annotations from every group member (initials). Be prepared to explain the poems to the class. 30 pts
- Groups are creating visuals, but have a choice in what they create (UDL model - samples will be shared prior to start.)

Lesson Eight:

- Groups will present their mind maps with a focus on how their author lived deliberately and how they are still impacting society today.
- Students will work individually to begin body paragraphs for their essay.