

NEH Landmarks Workshop: Henry David Thoreau Unit

Iowa Core Standards

RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.

RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

RI.11-12.9 Analyze seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational U.S. documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.

W.11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Introduction: Ken Burns documentary – 22 min. – found at walden.org

PowerPoint slideshow of Concord (from NEH Landmarks Workshop experience)

Epigraph to *Walden*: "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up."

Each of the following Journal Writings can take place during a class period, consisting of approximately 15 minutes of reading (either silent or as a class), 20 minutes of journaling, and 15 minutes of discussion. The students will be expected to produce at least a half-page of journaling. The journals will be collected at the end of the unit, and students will be given credit for their work. (Except for "Walking," page numbers refer to the Penguin Classics edition (1983) of *Walden and Civil Disobedience*.)

Excerpt from "Economy" (pp. 45-47, 50-51, 61-62) – "I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life."

Journal Prompt: Think and write about the various meanings and connotations of *account*, *accounting*, *being accountable*, and *holding oneself accountable*. What would your "private business" look like if you were only accountable to yourself? What would it cost you to be entirely independent of your parents?

Excerpt from "Economy" (pp. 80-81) – "But lo! men have become the tools of their tools."

Journal Prompt: How would you define these two uses of the word *tools* in this sentence? Which of your tools are imprisoning you? What would happen if you gave them up?

Excerpt from “Economy” (pp. 83-86, 87-89, 91-92) – “I give the details because very few are able to tell exactly what their houses cost, and fewer still, if any, the separate cost of the various materials which compose them.”

Journal Prompt: Use the handout to provide a two-column tabulation of the cost (in time or money) of a day. Pick the 24 hours of your most recent Saturday or Sunday. Tabulate in the left column the cost in time or money of everything you did. Comment on those events in the right column. Reflect on what you learn by answering the questions on the verso. [See James Finley’s handout.]

Excerpt from “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For” (pp. 135-137, 141-143) – “I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life.”

Journal Prompt: Think and write about the meanings and connotations of the adjective and verb *deliberate*. Why, in your opinion, does Thoreau want to go to the woods? What settings or contexts allow you to deliberate most effectively? [Bever Park Trail journal]

Excerpt from “Brute Neighbors” (pp. 274-278) – “It is remarkable how many creatures live wild and free though secret in the woods, and still sustain themselves in the neighborhood of towns.”

Journal Prompt: Immerse yourself in the outdoors. Pay close attention to the natural world around you. Describe something in your environment in a way that takes you deeply into it and shows your connection to it. [Bever Park Trail journal]

Excerpt from “Walking” (pp. 1, 8, 12, 13, 14, 23, text from www.theatlantic.com) – “In Wildness is the preservation of the world.”

Journal Prompt: Analyze Thoreau’s use of the word *wildness* in this statement and this essay. What distinctions is he drawing between *wildness* and *wilderness*? What arguments does he make for the importance of wild(er)ness? Note where you agree and disagree with these arguments.

Excerpt from “Conclusion” (pp. 371-374, 377-379) – “If a man [or woman] does not keep pace with his [or her] companions, perhaps it is because he [or she] hears a different drummer. Let him [or her] step to the music which he [or she] hears, however measured or far away.” (Share Jeffrey Cramer’s “Tracing the different drummer passage” handout)

Journal Prompt: Write about one situation in which you decided to step to the beat of a different drummer. What was difficult about making this decision? What made it the right decision for you?

The Project-Based Learning Assignment requires a week of work. It can be a solo or team project, and the students have three to choose from. The end product of each project should be a journal of research and findings and a presentation that reports the findings and discoveries and actions to the class.

Excerpt from "Economy" (pp. 59-61) – "For many years I was self-appointed inspector of snow storms and rain storms."

Project-Based Learning Assignment: Invent a department or office at school that has a creative and seemingly pointless purpose and that you are in charge of – e.g., inspector of bathrooms or parking lots, department of overheard in the hallway. Do the work of your job, gather data and keep detailed notes, give a presentation of your work to the class, produce a report of your findings with recommended action for the school administration or board of directors. This can be a solo or team project.

Excerpt from "Solitude" (pp. 174-176, 180-182) – "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time.... I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude."

Project-Based Learning Assignment: Identify something in your digital life that you could give up and that would allow you to experience significantly more solitude than you do now. It should be something that takes up a considerable amount of your "free time," for example, your cell phone, social media accounts, video games, Netflix or television. Commit to removing that element from your life for at least five days and up to an entire week. Write a journal about this experience (at least five entries and/or a thousand words). What did you discover about yourself from this experience? How did you use the free time that resulted from giving up something? Explain what you learned about yourself in this solitude experience. Give a presentation to the class.

Excerpt from "Civil Disobedience" (pp. 385-403, 412-413) – "I think that we should be men [or women] first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have the right to assume, is to do at any time what I think is right."

Project-Based Learning Assignment: In this essay, Thoreau is arguing for the majority of one, the majority of a moral conscience. Create a research project that will culminate in some action. You could enter the sphere of politics, economics, culture, society, the environment. This could be local or national or global in scope. Document and cite your research in a journal. Based on that research, come up with an action plan that will enable you to engage with the world and effect change. Follow the steps of your action plan. Give a presentation to the class. This can be a solo or team project.

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