

## **Living and Writing Deliberately: The Concord Landscapes and Legacy of Henry David Thoreau**

### **Curriculum Project**

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This is a unit plan based on the life and work of Henry David Thoreau and the theme of living in nature. It is designed for fourth grade, but could easily be adapted for slightly older or younger students. It begins with teaching students to simply observe nature and see what there is to learn, which leads to the creation of a field guide to share lessons learned with others. In the second lesson students will survey an area, such as a school garden, playground, or other outside area, practicing surveying skills like Thoreau and creating a map. Finally, after observing and surveying, students will be ready to plan and plant their own bean field (or other vegetables), determining the location based on observations (what areas of the schoolyard get the most sun?) and using the maps to see what should be added and where. (Should the sunflowers go right next to the strawberry plants? Should a tree be planted next to the playground to provide shade in a few years?) Throughout the unit, various picture books, photos taken during the workshop in Concord, MA, the Walden video on [walden.org](http://walden.org), and other online sources may be used to introduce students to Henry David Thoreau.

All quotations were found at <https://www.walden.org/thoreau/thoreau-quotations/>.

### **Henry David Thoreau: Living in Nature**

#### **Essential Questions**

How does knowing about our environment (our sense of place - where we live, play, go to school) inform us?

What do we learn from observing nature around us?

How can we share our knowledge of nature with others?

Why are maps helpful, and how do we make them?

How do beans (or other plants) grow? What do seeds need?

What do we do if we grow more than we need?

#### **Lesson 1: Observation and Writing - Creating a Field Journal or Field Guide**

“What are the natural features which make a township handsome? A river, with its waterfalls and meadows, a lake, a hill, a cliff or individual rocks, a forest, and ancient trees standing singly. Such things are beautiful; they have a high use which dollars and cents never represent. If the inhabitants of a town were wise, they would seek to preserve these things, though at a considerable expense; for such things educate far more than any hired teachers or preachers, or any at present recognized system of school education.”—[Journal](#), 3 January 1861

#### **Procedure**

- For one week, or one day a week for several weeks (or even a full semester or school year), students will spend some time outside, observing and taking notes.
- Each student will need to find a spot to sit around the school garden or in a grassy area at the edge of the trees.
- Students are encouraged to write down what they see, hear, smell, and touch.
- Students can make graphs or charts to track changes in what they notice – maybe a plant grows a small amount each week, or the leaves change color and fall off the trees.
- Students will use their notes to create a field guide that can be shared with a younger grade or students who join the class mid-year.
- The field guide should have at least 3 examples each of things that one can see, hear, smell, or touch, as well as illustrations when appropriate.

### **Closing / Review / Assessment**

- The writing will be assessed according to a rubric based on grade level standards for writing assignments.
- A real-world assessment would be to share the field guides with a different class, and see if the students in the other class can accurately use the guides to determine the names of any plants, birds, or insects they might find.

### **Materials**

- Notebooks
  - Pencils
  - Colored pencils or markers
  - paper
  - Examples of field guides
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### **Lesson 2: Surveying and Mapmaking**

“I have lately been surveying the Walden woods so extensively and minutely that I now see it mapped in my mind’s eye—as, indeed, on paper—as so many men’s wood-lots, and am aware when I walk there that I am at a given moment passing from such a one’s wood-lot to such another’s . . .” ([Journal](#), 10:233-4).

### **Procedure**

- Working with a partner, students will measure the garden beds to create a map of the garden. (My school has a garden planted in raised cedar beds and large tires near the playground, as well as a few fruit trees. If your school does not have a garden, students could survey the playground, a school yard, or even the classroom.)
- Students must decide what scale to use and what symbols to use for the different plants.

### **Closing / Review / Assessment**

- Maps should be neat, detailed, and accurate. Students should be able to trade maps with other pairs and be able to use and understand their classmates' maps.

### **Materials**

- Measuring tape
  - Graph paper / clipboards
  - Pencils
  - Examples of maps, especially garden maps
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### **Lesson 3: Planning and Planting**

“When I witness the first plowing and planting, I acquire a long-lost confidence in the earth,—that it will nourish the seed that is committed to its bosom.”—[Journal](#), 28 March 1857

“When my hoe tinkled against the stones, that music echoed to the woods and the sky, and was an accompaniment to my labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop.”—[Walden](#)

### **Procedure**

- Using both the field guides and the maps, students can plan what additional seeds they would like to add to the garden. (Or, if your school does not have a garden, this might be a great time to create one!)
- Students should take into consideration the position of the sun, any shady spots created by trees or the school building, and the needs of the particular plants when making decisions about where to place plants.
- Students will need to conduct some research regarding various seeds and their needs, using the field guides, library books, and online sources.
- Students can add the proposed new plantings to the maps.
- Seeds may be started in containers in the classroom, and transplanted to the garden when ready.

### **Closing / Review / Assessment**

- The garden will need ongoing maintenance and watering.
- When beans or other vegetables are ready, students can harvest them!
- If the harvest is very successful, students can devise a plan to share it with others. Perhaps a local food bank or homeless shelter could use some of it. This could lead into looking at the theme of living in society based on Henry David Thoreau's work.

### **Materials**

- Gardening books for research
- Seeds
- Plastic cups or containers from the recycling bin
- Soil

- Gardening tools
- Watering can (or plastic jug with holes poked in it)