

***Living and Writing Deliberately: Using Thoreau's words and way of living to inspire creativity in our writing and awareness of the world around us.***

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## **Standards**

### **Craft and Structure:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5

Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6

Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### **Production and Distribution of Writing:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

### **Range of Writing**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3.B

Use narrative techniques, such as ...description, to develop experiences, events, characters, and/or setting.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3.D

Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events

## Resources:

- 1) introducing Henry David Thoreau (slideshow with pictures from Walden Pond and excerpts from *Thoreau at Walden* by John Porcellino)
- 2) [The Writings of Henry David Thoreau \(excerpts\)](#)
- 3) *The Guide to Walden Pond* by Robert M. Thorson
- 4) *Henry David Thoreau for Kids: His Life and Ideas*, by Crinne Hosfeld Smith

## Unit Goals

- Students will analyze excerpts of Thoreau's writing in order to gain an appreciation of his writing style, as well as to draw inspiration from the connectedness between experiences and sense of place (setting)
- Students will write object descriptions and setting descriptions using observation and analytical techniques
- Students will choose a symbolic place in nature or in their community, or an object in their own lives, and they will write about it using relevant descriptive details and sensory language to convey its meaning and significance.
- Students will "journal" in order to write observations about nature and people, and include thoughts on a variety of subjects, including books that they are reading. Illustrations are optional but encouraged.
- Students will create a "bumper sticker" and write a slogan for a cause important to them

## Learning Outcomes

Students will understand that effective writing and producing involve the processes of formulating, revising, and refining texts to share ideas in compelling and meaningful ways. They will not only gain experience with a wide range of writing and producing tasks, but they will also see the value of becoming lifelong writers through reading Thoreau's works and others. By experiencing it themselves, students will appreciate the art of writing and will desire to grow as effective writers, both within the academic context and in their daily lives. Ultimately students will discover that they have a voice, and that writing and producing is a way for them to express themselves as responsible and globally-conscious humans.

## Lesson 1

### Where's Your Walden?

*Focusing Quotes: "In a journal it is important in a few words to describe the weather, or character of the day as it affects our feelings. That which was so important at the time cannot be unimportant to remember" (February 5, 1855).*

Background information:

Thoreau took much time and effort to write Walden, his second book. He revised it so much that there are seven complete drafts, all written by hand with pen and ink!

Objective: Students will look at several entries in Thoreau's journal in which he wrote about a person who "marches to the beat of a different drummer," a passage which has become widely recognized and one of the most "quotable," among others by Thoreau. They will read writing samples of Thoreau in order to analyze the development of his writing and learn to value the role of journaling in their own writing as a means to develop their thoughts and ideas.

Application: Students will keep a journal. They can begin their entries with notes about the weather or write observations about nature and people or whatever is on their mind. They can draw pictures and keep a collection of their writing. Their first entry will be their answer to the prompt, "Where's Your Walden?" Teacher will model a "think aloud" by writing to this prompt in her own journal (This can be pre-written or written on the spot using the document camera to share on screen). Show the slideshow, [Henry David Thoreau - an Introduction](#), to provide background information about what led Henry to build a house in the woods and to show pictures of the place of his inspiration. This slideshow and assignment provides not only insight into Henry, the person, but also, it propels students into the next lessons which focus on descriptive language and writing setting and object descriptions.

Resources linked below:

- [Tracing the different drummer passage \(compiled by Jeffrey S. Cramer\)](#)

*Teacher will prompt students throughout the year as well as provide sentence starters not limited to but similar to the ones below. Students will have a working journal(s) which will be their companion throughout the year as a collection of their writing samples and source of inspiration.*

- I learned from (the character, the event) that in life it is important to...
- Even if...you should...
- This story teaches us not only about... but also about...
- When I first read this story I thought it was just about ...but now that I think more deeply about it, I realize it is really about...
- Something that is true in this story that is also true in the world is...
- (Character's name) shows/ teaches/ demonstrates that...

## Lesson 2

### Reflective Narrative Writing Techniques: Setting Descriptions

Focusing Quotes:

*“Some of my pleasantest hours were during the long rain storms in the spring or fall...when an early twilight ushered in a long evening in which many thoughts had time to take root and unfold themselves...’Let the thunder rumble...take shelter under the cloud...’ In the midst of a gentle rain, while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in nature...in the very pattering of the drops and in every sound and sight around my house...an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once, like an atmosphere sustaining me.”*

Background Information:

As writers of reflective narratives, creating setting descriptions is important for several reasons:

- Setting has a meaningful role in the development of one’s story.
- The ways in which people feel about a place and the senses they associate with that place causes them to assign concepts and values to it.

Objective: Students will think of a place that it is important to them, in nature or anywhere. They will write setting descriptions in order to incorporate narrative writing techniques in their reflective narratives.

From the *Guide to Walden Pond*, by Robert M. Thorson:

Walden Pond is, first and foremost, the site of Thoreau’s famous experiment in deliberate living. What makes Walden special? I begin with landscape. After watching the “morning star” rise over Walden Pond for two years, two months, and two days, Henry developed a hyper-concentrated sense of place. Effectively, he became one with nature, or as close to full immersion as most of us will ever get. He achieved this by self-identifying with the lake’s solitude, purity, simplicity, sensitivity, strength, and renewal. These physical attributes of an actual place corresponded to the spiritual attributes he was seeking within himself as a human being.

At first Thoreau may not have intended to write a book about his two-year experience at the pond. But he gave more than 30 lectures in the nine years after he left, and most of those talks were about Walden. He pulled his notes together and tested some of his material out on his listeners. He emphasized the importance of getting outside and appreciating nature. “Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it,” he said. “We need the tonic of wildness. . . We can never have enough of nature.”

## Detail Generating Questions for Setting Descriptions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use imagery to bring an ordinary setting to life and make it real.</li><li>• Sensory details allow the reader to see, hear, and experience the setting in the same way.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What was the temperature like?</li><li>• What kind of plants/trees grew there?</li><li>• How did the air feel?</li><li>• What kinds of animals were there?</li><li>• What kinds of buildings were there?</li><li>• What kinds of objects were around?</li><li>• What kinds of sounds did he/ she hear?</li><li>• How does he/ she feel about being there?</li><li>• What did they smell?</li></ul>
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### *Resources:*

- [Detail Generating Questions for Writing Descriptive Paragraphs](#)
- [Walden excerpts](#)
- [Henry David Thoreau - an Introduction](#)

### Lesson 3

#### Reflective Narrative Writing Techniques: Object Descriptions

Focusing Quotes:

*“We eagerly filled our pockets with the smooth round pebbles which in some places, even here, were thinly sprinkled over the sand, together with the flat circular shells...but, as we had read, when they were dry they had lost their beauty, and at each sitting we emptied our pockets again of the least remarkable, until our collection was well culled.”*

*“Though I do not believe a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed, -as, to me, mysterious origin for it. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders...A little mysterious hoeing and manuring was all the abracadabra presto-change that I used.”*

*“Its broad pinnate tropical leaf was pleasant though strange to look on...In August, the large masses of berries, which, when in flower, had attracted many wild bees, gradually assumed their bright velvety crimson hue, and by their weight again bent down and broke the tender limbs.”*

Background Information:

Objects in nature were important to Henry. On Cape Cod, in Massachusetts, Henry picked up the rocks he liked, then decided in the end which ones were good enough to save. He kept his rocks in a wooden “box for geological specimens” which he built for himself. Also, at a meeting of local farmers in Concord, he told of a time when he planted a few squash seeds, and his garden grew five large yellow squashes weighing a total of 310 pounds. It started with the seeds!

Just as Thoreau wrote of the objects of his surroundings, writers of reflective narratives include descriptions of important objects. Creating object descriptions is an effective strategy to use in your writing for several reasons:

- Objects in narratives often play a meaningful role in the development of the plot
- Objects can be symbols that represent themes in one’s story; and
- Objects can help the narrator *and* reader connect with an experience in a sensory way

Objective: Students will think of an object that it is important to them, in nature or anywhere, and write object descriptions in their journal. Students will incorporate these object descriptions in a reflective narrative based on an experience they have had.

Application: Students will practice with objects the teacher has brought into the classroom. Teacher will choose one of the objects in the “museum” or “art gallery,” and then model writing object descriptions using the sentence starters provided.

Authors "Zoom In" to create critical object descriptions. Use this as a reference to get your creative juices flowing!

Detail Generating Questions	STUCK? Use a sentence frame!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What color was it?</li> <li>• What did it feel like?</li> <li>• What was its shape?</li> <li>• What size was it?</li> <li>• How old was it?</li> <li>• What was it made of?</li> <li>• What did it smell like?</li> <li>• What kind of sound did it make?</li> <li>• How heavy was it?</li> <li>• To whom did it belong?</li> <li>• Where did it come from?</li> <li>• What did it remind you of?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It reminded me of _____.</li> <li>• It looked _____ yet _____.</li> <li>• The most interesting thing about ____</li> <li>• It gave off an odor/aroma of _____.</li> <li>• At first glance it appeared _____, but looking closely _____.</li> <li>• Perhaps it had something to do with _____, but _____ had always _____.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>The _____ was _____ and _____, made of _____, and the _____ was _____ in _____.</p>

Resources:

Resources include objects of various sizes, shapes, and textures and representing objects from our natural environment, various cultures, and time periods to be viewed in a "narrative artifact museum." Other resources include a pink sheet of paper that includes "detail generating questions" (attached below) and sentence starters for students to which students can refer when they write critical object descriptions. In addition, each student can use a "zoom-in" tool (either a magnifying glass or paper-towel roll) to "zoom-in" on objects and see details they might not otherwise have seen. Also, the teacher will show photos of Henry David Thoreau's snowshoes as well. Students will make observations of the details and characteristics of the snowshoes and make inferences about where they came from, whether they were useful, etc. Then, the teacher will reveal the journal entries written by Henry David Thoreau.

- [Snowshoes Journal Entry - HDT](#)
- [Critical Object Descriptions: Detail Generating Questions and Sentence Frames](#)
- [Collection of Artifacts at Concord Museum](#)
- [Henry David Thoreau - an Introduction](#)

## Lesson 4: Writing Deliberately and Figuratively

A metaphor compares two usually unlike things, often by using the word *is*.

- *“A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.”*
- *“Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one.*
- *“Heaven is under our feet, as well as over our heads.”*

A simile compares two usually unlike things by using the words *like* or *as*.

- *“The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer’s yard.”*
- *“On gala days the town fires its great guns, which echo like popguns to these woods.”*
- *“The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling.*
- *“Happiness is like a butterfly; the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder.*
- *“As it grew darker, I was startled by the honking of geese flying low over the woods, like weary travellers getting in late from southern lakes, and...with hushed clamor wheeled and settled in the pond.”*

Background Information: English is a dynamic language, with words that can carry different meanings in different situations and can be understood in several different ways. Henry enjoyed finding and using such words in his descriptions. He especially liked to use metaphors and similes to make his readers think about relationships.

Objective: Students will read various excerpts of *Walden* that include examples of figurative language, identify the type of figurative language, and discuss interpretations with their group.

Application: Using the tools of language and writing, such as figurative language, students will portray the connections they are making between what is happening in nature and what is happening in their community and world around them. Students will be encouraged to use their journal and observations to make meaningful connections between their writing and their experiences, using figurative language as a tool.

## Lesson 5

### Be Thoreau: Living Deliberately

Focusing Quotes:

*“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”*

*“However mean your life is, meet it and live it...”*

*“...I am convinced both by faith and experience, that to maintain one’s self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely...”*

*“If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in the common hours.”*

Background Information: Thoreau paid close attention to more than just the plants, animals, and waterways of New England. He watched what the government and the people around him were doing, too. He wasn’t always pleased with what he saw. And he wasn’t afraid to speak up or take action.

Objective: Students will read closely excerpts from Thoreau’s essays, including “Civil Disobedience” and “Slavery in Massachusetts.” They will also read excerpts from civil rights activists in our history, including the community of women in Concord, like Louisa May Alcott. They will also read about Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Junior, and present-day activists.

Application: Students will look at various slogans and/or hashtags over the course of history, including slogans that have been made into bumper stickers. Students will be exposed to different bumper stickers collected by the teacher (optional). If no bumper stickers are available, the teacher can make a Powerpoint presentation or Google Slides presentation. The stickers should reflect local causes as well as regional and global causes. Students will create their own using graphic design applications and/or their own artwork. Their bumper sticker should reflect a current issue in their community, express a concise slogan, and present a compelling graphic.