

# Henry David Thoreau at a Primary Level

Unit by Z. Rocio      Thread #5: Living in Nature

Since I will be teaching kindergarten this Fall my focus will be very general. The lessons presented here could also be used in the first grade.

Essential Question: How can a young individual live more simply the Thoreau way?

Lesson: Using Your Senses

Objective: Children will have several experiences to help them use their senses to develop an understanding about the world around them.

Thoreau quote: How could youths better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of living?

First tell students who Henry Thoreau was and the kinds of things he did during his lifetime. Include where he lived (use a map of the United States showing where you are and where he lived). You should show a picture of him and the pictures of the houses he lived in and the places he lived.

Thoreau quote: Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plain.

For the sense of sight and feel:

Materials: Leaves, paper, crayons, pencils, hand lenses

Note: You can use only leaves from trees, bushes, vegetables, and flowers. It depends what you have available.

Have students go outside and gather 4 different leaves to bring back to the classroom.

Thoreau's quote: An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day.

If this is not possible, you gather the leaves ahead of time and bring them to class. Make sure each children has at least 4 different leaves to look at and compare.

- 1) Student look at each of their leaves (if available let the students have hand lenses to look at them closer) and share would is similar and different about them. They can describe the color, size, what it feels like, its shape, and number of leaflets on a stem. This can be done at their tables or as a whole group.
- 2) Next have them draw their leaves on paper. They could trace around them and then fill in the details. If this is too hard for them, have them turn over the leaf, put standard size paper over it, and use the side of a crayon to rub over it. They should be able to see the veins of the leaf clearly now.

- 3) The teacher makes large posters of each of the different shape leaves that students had. The students then place their leaves on the correct poster. This helps the children to classify the shapes. You could also have a poster for the unknown shapes and with more background knowledge later the children could figure out where these go or they may be outliers.
- 4) Display students drawing on a bulletin board.
- 5) Next steps, if time allows or if possible have the students press their leaves and let them dry for several days. This can be done between sheets of newspaper and a heavy book on them. After that the teacher can put them between wax paper and with a cotton cloth over it, iron the sandwiched leaves. Or, use the dried leaves in your paper making project (look up how to make your own paper on the internet).
- 6) A twist on this activity could be using the seeds of different plants, or using bivalve shells giving the students one half of the shell with the other half in a pile of separated shells. The student first draws their shell on paper including all the details. After that the student then needs to find their other “half” of the shell in the pile. This activity is better for upper grades.

For the sense of smell:

\*First of all, find out if your students are allergic to anything.

Materials: small flexible plastic containers or bottles with small opening at the top; samples of different spices, pieces of lemon peel, lavender, crushed pine needles and rosemary; balls of cotton

\*Again find out from parents if their child would be allergic to any of these items.

- 1) Teacher places a small item in separate bottles. If the bottle is see-through then cover the outside of the bottle with dark paper or paint the outside of it. If you are using an oil or liquid of one of your samples then place this on the cotton ball and insert this into the bottle.
- 2) Have students squeeze the bottle a short distance from their nose and tell them to inhale. Remind students this is not squeeze onto their face or in their noses. Please demonstrate the use before allowing the students to do this.
- 3) After smelling each bottle’s odor, have students guess (based on their experience) what each smell was. Sharing first with their table partners and then as a whole group.
- 4) As a class, hold up pictures of the plants that you had samples of. See if they can now match the smell to each picture. Have them smell again the bottles. Give students the answers before moving on.

For the sense of taste:

Caution here- ask permission from parents before doing this.

Materials: very small paper cups or cups from a children’s tea set, different types of tea, a source for heating up water

- 1) Tell the students that they are going to have a tea party. Students only need about a tablespoon of each tea to taste the difference in teas. Make sure the tea is just lukewarm not boiling hot.
- 2) Have students describe the taste they experienced with each tea. What kinds of teas did they like and why. You may find some children may not want to participate and that is alright too.
- 3) Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.with it.

## Lesson 2

Essential Question: What kind of shelter would you need to protect yourself/your things from the outside elements?

Objective: Students will build a shelter for their crayons so they would not melt outside.

Materials: old broken crayons, re-useable items such as an old shoe box, straws, twigs, dowels, paper, foil, cardboard pieces, clean cardboard lunch trays, milk carton, etc., colored construction paper.

- 1) Before students start engineering their shelter, they will need background information on the following things; the weather, sun, and types of shelters for humans and animals.
- 2) Students are given a piece of cardboard that is 18"x18", and told to build a shelter for five crayons with any of the items the teacher has provided. They have one partner to work with them. It is best if they have a partner because then they are learning to share their ideas and to work cooperatively.
- 3) Students need to design by drawing their shelter and labeling the parts on paper first before teacher will allow them to get their supplies.
- 4) The students then test their shelter outside on a very sunny hot day.
- 5) Leaving their shelter outside for an hour (during the hottest part of the day), they observe their crayons. Did they melt? Are they useable? If not, they will need to go back to their drawing table and come up with another plan and try again building it.
- 6) The students will later share with the class what worked and/or did not work for the sheltering their crayons. Students will write a couple of sentences about this and add it to their design drawings.
- 7) Please note it is not important that every child's shelter works, it is very important learning what does not work.

Thoreau's quote: Our moments of inspiration are not lost though we have no particular poem to show for them; for those experiences have left an indelible impression, and we are ever and anon reminded of them.

Also I would like to add to this unit information and activities about John Muir because he was another important person that had contact with Henry Thoreau and he is equally important here in California.

Helpful Resources:

\*California Forest Products Commission- they have a video lending library. Some titles of videos they have are A Walk in the Woods, California's Forest, Circle of Life, The Dynamic Forest, House, and The Miracle Resource.

\*Check out Project Learning Tree website and even Project Wild.

\*Check out your local library, they may have Nature Backpacks to check out.

\*Exploritorium website for experiments of your senses.