Living and Writing Deliberately:  
A Seventh Grade Interdisciplinary Writing Unit

Background Information:

This is a set of three interdisciplinary units using the ideas and writings of Henry David Thoreau. The goal is to help students become curious observers and thoughtful participants in the world around them. While the lessons were designed with a seventh grade classroom in mind, the lessons could easily be adapted for grades five through eight. Writing is the primary focus of the units, and the units were designed to be used in the Language Arts classroom. All lessons will incorporate observing, questioning, writing, and reflecting. Some lessons also incorporate character development, history, and science to help make the learning interdisciplinary.

Although these lessons could be used at any point during the year, they were designed with the beginning of the school year in mind. Using these lessons at the start of the year will help build positive relationships and thoughtful behavior in the classroom, while encouraging deep reflection and observation throughout the year. The interdisciplinary science and social studies lessons will bridge learning between the classroom walls, helping build skills in all classes while reinforcing the students’ critical thinking. This will help the students understand that learning does not happen in isolation, but that learning happens by putting skills together to solve problems. This is, of course, how Thoreau would have preferred for our young minds learn.

Some lessons would also be acceptable to teach during an Advisory Class (or similar character building class) since they focus on decision making and standing up for your personal beliefs. Specifically, lessons 1-2 of the first unit could be used during Advisory Class.

Students should have access to journals throughout this unit, as they will record their observations, thoughts, and reflections continuously. As a pre-unit lesson, teachers should introduce the idea of journaling. It would be helpful to show images of Thoreau’s journals and explain to the students that his journals were a “barnyard” to record all of his ideas, observations, and even just lists about his day-to-day life. (See photos of the journals, attached, to help build the conversation.)

The students’ journals can be used as both formative and summative assessment throughout the unit. As a final project, teachers might consider having the students take one to two of their entries through the publication process to complete a final draft. Students could then pair each entry with a related object or symbol and “curate” their own “mini-exhibition.” Students could then set up the classroom as a gallery and then visit the full writing gallery as a sharing experience.

Photographs, images, and maps needed for the lessons can be found in the Additional Materials section at the end of the document. Worksheets to enrich and organize the lessons can be found in the Additional Materials section as well. See page 19 for an index.

Threads Incorporated within the Unit:

1. Being Awake, Aware, and Alive
2. Living in Nature
3. Practicing Simplicity
4. Choosing Life with Principle
**Life with Principle: A Study of Thoreau’s Passions and Our Personal Passions**

**Unit Length:** 2 days, 42 minute periods

**Thread:**
- Choosing Life with Principle

**Essential Questions:**
- Why is it important to stand up for what you believe in?
- Is it always necessary to follow the rules?
- How can we use writing to voice our opinions?
- Why is it important to take ownership of our beliefs?

**Grade 7 Common Core Standards:**

**Writing Standards:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.10
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.

**Reading- Informational Text Standards:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2
Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3
Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

**Speaking and Listening Standards:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1
Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

**DAY 1: Personal Beliefs Survey, Discussion, and Reflection**
Objective:

Students will take a position on a belief statement(s) and support their decision with information from their own lives/literature to engage in class discussion and craft a written response.

Materials:

- Beliefs Survey
- Agree/Disagree Signs
- Student Journals
- Pens/Pencils

Special Classroom Setup:

- When the students enter, have them help move all the desks to the sides of the classroom, as this lesson will need a large empty area. If you have access to a hallway or open space, you could utilize that instead.
- Before class starts, write “Strongly Agree” on one piece of construction paper. Write “Strongly Disagree” on another. Hang the two signs at opposite ends of an accessible wall.

Lessons Plan:

1. Distribute the Beliefs Survey (see worksheet attached). Have students complete the Beliefs Survey independently. They should check the column that matches their personal beliefs. Explain that although it can be difficult to choose a side, they should go with whichever choice they feel more strongly about right now. They will have the opportunity to explain their reasoning (and even change their mind) later on. Reinforce the idea that they should not discuss their results with anyone until the activity begins. (5-7 minutes)

2. Explain to students: “Today we will be doing an activity that makes you consider what you believe in and why. Today’s answers may be very personal, and it is very important that you are respectful and polite during the activity. There is NO right or wrong answers to any of the questions on the survey. In fact, you may end up changing your mind about some of the answers you chose, and that’s okay! Today is all about thinking, considering, and reflecting about what you believe in. Tomorrow we will be learning about a writer, thinker, and activist named Henry David Thoreau. We will be using these questions to help us think about Thoreau and why he made some of the choices he did.” (1-2 minutes)

3. Ranking Activity/Discussion: Read the first belief statement out loud. Have students get out of their seats and organize themselves on the wall in between “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree.” The point they stand between the signs should reflect how strongly they feel about the statement.

While students are still standing, ask for volunteers to share how and why they chose their position. If volunteers do not respond from both ends of the spectrum, call on students to ensure that varying views are shared with the whole class.
Repeat the process for all five questions. If you class discussion for a particular statement gets longer than four to five minutes per question, reduce the number of belief statements to explore. (20 minutes)

4. Personal Reflection:
   Once the activity is complete, students will return to their desks. In their journal, they should freewrite to the following question(s): “Did you change your mind about any of the statements? Why do you think that is? What made you change your mind?” If a student says they didn’t change their mind at all, ask them to respond to: “Which of these statements do you feel most passionately about? Why?” (5-7 minutes)

5. Sharing
   Have students share their journal response with a partner. If time permits, allow volunteers to share the most important sentence from their entry with the whole class. Discuss the importance of thinking carefully about the world around you and remind them life is not black and white: there are many grey areas to explore. (5 minutes)

6. Close out class with a photograph of the lock from Thoreau’s jail cell. Ask students, “What do you think this is a photo of?” Once students get to “a lock” or “from a jail cell,” explain that it is the lock from Thoreau’s jail cell. Give the students a brief overview of how Thoreau spent one night in jail standing up for what he believed in. Link this experience (standing up for beliefs) with the beliefs survey. (4-5 minutes)

Assessments: Journal Entry, Student responses during discussion

DAY 2: Analyzing and Applying the Beliefs of Henry David Thoreau

Objective:
Students will be able to list the ways that Thoreau stood up for his values and explain why his actions were/are important in historic and modern contexts. Students will then analyze this in relation to their own lives.

Materials:
- Selected Articles/Documents
  - “Primary Sources: Thoreau’s Walden Pond, Why he Went Into the Woods” from Newsela
  - “Primary Sources: ‘Civil Disobedience’” by Henry David Thoreau from Newsela
  - “Philosophers: Henry David Thoreau” from Newsela
  - “Henry David Thoreau” from Britannica School
  - Any other grade-level appropriate articles of your choice that reveal information about Thoreau’s philosophies and passions

Each group will read a different article about Thoreau’s life OR a leveled, kid-friendly version of one of his essays. Have enough appropriately leveled articles to differentiate as needed. Suggested articles/documents include three from the Newsela.com site which can be leveled by the teacher with the click of a button. The fourth article can be found on Britannica School (school.eb.com), an interactive encyclopedia which many middle schools subscribe to. This text can also be leveled.
with the click of a button, and the site also includes a read-aloud feature for students who need that accommodation.

- Passions and Philosophies Graphic organizer (attached)

Special Classroom Setup:
1. Desks should be arranged into small groups of 4-5 students. You may group students randomly, differentiate by reading level, or differentiate by students’ choice of article.

Lesson Plan:
1. Have students respond to the following question as a warm-up writing activity: “What have you had to stand up for or defend in your lifetime? Explain why you are so passionate about this topic.” (5 minutes)

2. Share answers within small groups (3-4 minutes)

3. Explain to students: “Today we are going to investigate the writer Henry David Thoreau and what he was passionate about. As you work in your small groups, pay attention to why types of things or ideas Thoreau defended. Ask yourself, what did Thoreau stand up for? (Write this on the board to reinforce what students should be looking for as they read.) Each group will be responsible for a different article, and then you will share the information with the others groups later in class. Be sure to annotate your article and take notes on your graphic organizer so you are prepared to share later on.” (1-2 minutes)

4. Distribute articles and graphic organizers to each group. (See worksheet attached.)

5. Read through directions on graphic organizer together.

6. Give the students approximately 15 minutes to read the article out loud together and add two to three issues on their graphic organizer. (15 minutes)

7. Have each group select what they think is their BEST example of what Thoreau is passionate about, based on their text. Circulate the room while students are choosing to make sure there are no duplicates. If there are, help steer the groups to their strongest unique idea. (2 minutes)

8. Sharing: Have one student from each group share their idea. Use the Smartboard or an easel chart to capture the students answers so that the class has a model and a reference for later on. (5 minutes)

9. Have students reflect on the survey activity from yesterday, and see which statements now match up to what they know about Thoreau’s life. (5 minutes)

10. Closing Quickwrite in Journals: “Think about what Thoreau stood up for during his lifetime. Why is it important that he took a stand? What similarities can you find between Thoreau and his passion and what YOU wrote about at the beginning of class today?” (5 minutes)
Assessments: Journal Entries, Graphic Organizer, Student responses during group work
# Nature Study: Combining the Powers of Location and Observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Length:</th>
<th>4 days, 42 minute periods</th>
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<td>Two Threads:</td>
<td>Living in Nature, Practicing Simplicity</td>
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<td><strong>Essential Questions:</strong></td>
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<td>What can we learn by looking at the world around us?</td>
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<td>How does nature “change” when we look at it closely?</td>
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<td>Why is it important to know how to write both objectively and subjectively?</td>
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<td>How does observational writing help us practice simplicity?</td>
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<td>How does being a good observer help us in life?</td>
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<td>How can we accurately capture the details that we see in nature?</td>
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## Grade 7 Common Core Standards:

**Writing Standards:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3
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.7.3.B
Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.D
Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.10
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.

**Reading Standards:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

**Speaking and Listening Standards:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1
Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
**Note:** This set of lessons is designed to be planned and co-taught between the science teacher AND the language arts teacher. It will require preplanning to make sure that both teachers have the same expectations for students about recording observations in nature. This lesson set also requires finding a natural spot (park, pond, river trail, etc.) that is easily accessed from the school. In my case, I will be using a local YMCA camp with a lake that is within walking distance of the school.

**DAY 1: Introduction to Observation**

**Objective:**
Students will develop a definition for the word “observant” and explain the importance of being observant for both Thoreau and themselves.

**Materials:**
- Student Journals
- Pens/pencils
- Picture book *If You Spent a Day with Thoreau at Walden Pond* (or similar)

**Special Classroom Setup:**
- Small groups of 4-5 students

**Lesson Plan:**
1. Have students respond to the following question as a warm-up writing activity: “What does it mean to be observant? Why would being observant be a beneficial trait for a person? Explain.” (5 minutes)

2. Have students share their response with a neighbor. Share out with the class. (2 minutes)

3. Begin class by reading the picture book *If You Spent a Day with Thoreau at Walden Pond* by Robert Burleigh. If you have projector access, project the pictures for students. This picture book will serve as a jumping point for discussing the importance of observation in the natural world. (Any similar picture book about Thoreau and nature can be used.) (15 minutes)

4. In small groups, have students discuss the following questions and record responses in their journals: (5 minutes)
   - What did you observe about the pictures and text in this book? Be specific.
   - Why do you think Henry David Thoreau was so observant? Why is that an important trait for him to have?
   - What types of things would Thoreau have missed if he wasn’t observant? What might he not have noticed if he wasn’t looking carefully?

5. Students will respond to the following quick write in their journal: Being observant in nature helped Henry David Thoreau live on Walden Pond successfully. When is a time in your life that you needed to be incredibly observant? Explain.
6. Partner Shares of journal entries. If time permits, allow volunteers to share with the class. (5 minutes)

**Assessments:** journal entries, contributions to class discussion

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**DAY 2: Identifying Objective and Subjective Statements**

**Objective:**
Students will be able to define, compare/contrast, and explain when to use objective and subjective writing.

Students will be able to analyze an excerpt of Thoreau’s writing and decide which statements are subjective or objective.

**Materials:**
- Student Journals
- Pens/Pencils
- Teacher samples of objective and subjective writing about a topic (Note: for this lesson, it would be helpful to have the science teacher write the objective sample and the language arts teacher write the subjective sample about the SAME object, for example a tree, flower, or other natural object.)
- Sample of Thoreau’s writing. Suggested selection: The fifth paragraph of “The Ponds,” paragraph starting with “The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale…” (attached)
- Highlighters (2 colors per student)
- Photograph of Walden Pond (attached)

**Special Classroom Setup:**
- Pair students with partners ahead of time

**Lesson Plan:**
1. Using a Smartboard or projector, project the first writing sample on the board. (subjective writing). Read out loud with the students. (1 minute)

2. With their partners, students should quickly discuss what they notice about the writing sample. (30 seconds)

3. Display the second sample (objective writing). Read out loud with the students.

4. With their partners again, students should quickly discuss what they notice about the second sample and compare/contrast the two. (1 minute)

5. Share out responses as a class. If needed, lead students to the idea that the first sample (subjective) contains opinions about the object and is not as factual. The second sample (objective) does not contain opinion and is strictly factual. (5 mins)
6. In their journals, have students construct a T-chart. Model this on the board or projector. Label one side of the chart Objective and the other Subjective. As a class, create working definitions for each term. (5 minutes)

7. With their partners again, have students discuss times when you would use each type of writing. Record on T-chart. (2 minutes)

8. Discuss as a class. If needed, be sure to lead students to the idea that that writers use subjective writing to create imagery, rich descriptions, and/or personal opinions. Writers use objective writing to record accurate details about the world around them. (2 minutes)

9. Ask partners, “In which classes are you most likely to use each type of writing? Why?” (1 minute)

10. Recap as a class that you would use more subjective writing in language arts and more objective writing in science. (30 seconds)

11. Project the photo of Walden Pond on the board. Ask students, “What do you notice about this photo?” Briefly explain why the location was so important to Thoreau.

12. Pass out worksheet containing the sample passage from “The Ponds” from Walden (attached). Go over the directions at the top of the page. Partners should read the passage out loud together and then highlight the passage in two colors, one color for subjective statements and one color for objective statements. While students are working, circulate around the classroom to check for accuracy and have quick conferences about what the students observe about the writing. (10 minutes)

13. Ask students to respond in journal:
   - Why do you think that Thoreau used a mix of objective and subjective writing in this passage (and in Walden)? What does this show us about what Thoreau was trying to accomplish with this passage?
   - How did your basic observations about the photograph of the pond differ from Thoreau’s writing on the exact same subject? Why do you think that is? (10 minutes)

14. Review and recap the questions above. Explain to students that tomorrow they will be following the same writing process as Thoreau, zooming in on nature and then writing about it to capture all the smallest details. Remind them to bring cameras or cell phones to class tomorrow for the field trip to the park.

Assessments: Journal entry, graphic organizer, partner discussions
DAY 3: Observational Writing Field Trip

Objective:
Students will record accurate observations of the natural world using their knowledge of objective writing. Students will create an objective written piece about one object.

Materials:
- Student journals
- Pens/pencils
- Cell phone or camera
- Photos of Concord Locations (Fairyland Pond, Old North Bridge, Walden Pond, and Concord River)

Special Classroom Setup/Note:
- Today’s activity is a field trip. If you live in walking distance to a park, river path, trail, camp, etc. you can walk there. If not, you will need to arrange transportation.

Lesson Plan:
1. Remind students: “Thoreau wrote about the everyday objects he found in his hometown, and whether they were big or small each one was important and fascinating to him.”

2. Gather students in a circle. Pass around photos of Fairyland Pond, Old North Bridge, Walden Pond, and Concord River. Remind students: “Although these might look like general nature photos, Thoreau finds each place special and honors it in his writing. They are a part of his home and his life, and his writing captures such locations in tremendous detail.”

3. Tell students: “Today we will have the chance to observe nature. As you have discussed with your science teacher and learned about during our objective writing lesson in language arts, today’s session is just about taking accurate observations. We will have two different ten-minute observation sessions. During each session, use the full time to carefully and fully observe one specific object or land feature. No matter how small the object is, it is your goal to record everything you can about it. Use your cell phone to take photographs so that you can remember the object tomorrow. You should always be in eyesight of a teacher or chaperone, but should find your own little space to observe silently.” (5-10 minutes to explain points above/organize students)

4. Send the students off in small groups with paras/chaperones/teachers to move around the park. Once students settle in to the individual observation spot, set a timer for 10 minutes. (10 minutes)

5. Once 10 minutes are up, have the students move to a new place in the park and repeat the activity another time. (10 minutes)
6. Divide the students into small groups with each teacher, depending on how many teachers are in attendance. Sit on a circle on the ground.

7. In the small group, ask students to reflect on the following:
   - Which objects did you choose? Why did they catch your attention?
   - What did you notice about the object the longer you looked at it? How did your perception change over time?
   - Why is it important to take time and observe carefully?
   - How could careful observation like this benefit you in life? Explain.
   - There is an abundance of simplicity in today’s experience (i.e. we actually sat down and wrote for 20 minutes straight, there were no interruptions and distractions like at school). How did simplifying the writing process help you with your writing?
   - In what other ways could you simplify your life and gain clarity?
   (10 minutes)

8. Once reflections are finished, organize students and return to school.

**Homework:** (Can be done at park if you have longer than 1 period available for the field trip, which is preferable):
Choose one of your objects. Using your notes from the park and the photographs you took, rewrite and polish one solid paragraph of objective writing about the object.

**Assessment:** journal notes/writing, objective paragraph piece contributions to small group discussions

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**DAY 4: Using Observations to Create Rich Description**

**Objective:**
Students will be able to create a subjective writing sample using previous objective notes combined with their own feelings, judgments, and emotions about an experience. Students will compare and contrast their objective and subjective writing samples.

**Materials:**
- Student Journals
- Pens/Pencils
- Student photographs from yesterday’s activity
- Passage from Walden, “The Ponds” paragraph five (see attached)

**Special Classroom Setup:**
- None

**Lesson Plan:**
1. Have students take out their objective writing samples.
2. In journals, have students respond to the writing warm up question: “How did it feel to write only objectively? Do you think that it impacted your writing style at all?” (5 minutes)

3. Discuss as a class. Move onto a discussion of “simplicity.” Discuss how observation writing forces the writer to break down an object into its most simple pieces, concentrating on the most pure form of the object. (3-4 minutes)

4. Explain: “Today we are going to move onto a second writing piece about the object you chose yesterday. However, today’s writing will be subjective. You will blend your true observations with your own opinions about what you saw and how it made you feel. Let’s look back to Thoreau’s passage from “The Ponds.” Notice how he has a mix of subjective and objective statements? Your goal is to do the same today. In fact, you can use this passage if you feel stuck or need some ideas about how to explain what you saw.” (1 minute)

5. Move into independent writing time (writers’ workshop). Teacher will circulate around the room and engage in mini-conferences with writers, giving suggestions and assistance. (25 minutes)

6. Sharing: Have students each select the single strongest sentence from their work in class today. Allow each student to share their one sentence.

7. Closing: Ask students which style of writing they enjoyed more. Have them explain their choice to the person sitting next to them.

Assessments: Subjective writing piece, journal entry
# Surveying the World Around You

**Unit Length:** 2 days, 42 minute periods  
**Thread:** Being Awake, Aware, and Alive  

**Essential Questions:**  
How can we become “more awake” as writers?  
How can we capture accurate details about our life experiences?  
How do our senses help us become better writers and observers?  
Why is it important to use our current location to learn about the world around us?  

**Grade 7 Common Core Standards:**  
**Writing Standards:**  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3  
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.7.3.B**  
Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.  

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.D**  
Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.  

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.8**  
Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.  

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.10**  
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.  

**Reading Standards:**  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.4  
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone  

**Speaking and Listening Standards:**  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1  
Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.2
Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.

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<th>DAY 1: Investigating Location with Primary Documents</th>
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<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Students will investigate the meaning of the word “convergence” and find convergence in both primary documents and their own lives.</td>
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<td><strong>Materials:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Student Journals</td>
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<td>- Pens/Pencils</td>
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<td>- Photograph of Egg Rock area (1 per group)</td>
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<td>- Map of Concord where Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers Meet (1 per group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Image of Thoreau’s Survey Map of the Concord River (section of river near the Old North Bridge) (1 per group)</td>
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<td>- Excerpt from On the Concord and Merrimack Rivers from “Saturday” paragraph 7</td>
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<td><strong>Special Classroom Setup:</strong></td>
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<td>- Arrange students’ desks into groups of 4 to 5</td>
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<td><strong>Lesson Plan:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Give each group copies of the Egg Rock Photograph, the map of Concord, and the Survey Map of the area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Ask students to work as a group to observe the three sources, and let them know that they are of the same area. Ask them: “What is this place? What do you notice about the area?” (5 mins)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Have students share out what their group found. Students will come up with answers like: there is a river (or three rivers), it is in Concord, there are trees, etc. (3-4 minutes)</td>
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<td>4. Explain to students that this place is special to Thoreau, and a place that he most likely spent a lot of time. It is also a special place because it represents convergence.</td>
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<td>5. Pass out Convergence Worksheet (attached; steps 7-12 can be found on worksheet).</td>
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<td>6. In small groups, ask students to try to break down the word using roots and other words they know. If needed, point them to the word “converge.” (2 minutes)</td>
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<td>7. Survey the class and begin writing down any correct responses on the board. Have a few students quickly look up the word in the dictionary (or on their phones) and compare their constructed definition with the real definition: “to move toward one point and join together: to come together and meet” (from Merriam-Webster Dictionary for ELL) (3 minutes)</td>
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8. Have students record definition and create an illustrated version of the word (see worksheet). (5 minutes)

9. In small groups, have students work through the analysis questions on the worksheet. (10-15 minutes)

10. Explain that “Finding locations in our hometowns that show convergence can help us find places that are special to us. Just like the area where Egg Rock is in Concord, we have our own areas of town that people have always found special. Tomorrow our goal will be to LOOK for those special areas here in our hometown. Once we find those special places, we can work on being awake, aware, and alive to consider what makes those places special. Listen to what Thoreau wrote about this area of the Concord River after observing the area so many times.”


12. Closing Questions: Do you think that knowing this river so well helped Thoreau write such a detailed passage about the river? Why?” Discuss. (5 minutes)

Homework: In their journals, have students answer this question: How does paying attention to your surroundings make you a better writer? How could this help you become more awake and aware as a writer?

Assessments: Journal entry, completed worksheet, student discussions

DAY 2: Trip to the Convergence Site

Objective:
Students will find an example of convergence in their hometown and use the location to create a vivid piece of writing.

Materials:
- Student journals
- Pens/Pencils
- Cameras or cell phones
- Maps of the field trip site

Special Classroom Setup:
Today’s class should happen off site in a place where you can find one or more examples of convergence. If you can’t take a field trip, then you can do a “digital field trip” instead. Use Google Maps to have students “travel” around their hometown and search for important sites. With the tremendous technology available through Google Maps, students may be able to find more historical and natural sites then if they were walking through town!
In my classroom, students will be traveling to the historic canal in our hometown. Once a railroad was built right next to the canal, the canal was no longer used for transport. At this time, the former railroad tracks (the New Haven to Northampton Line) are now a paved walking trail. There are many examples of convergence here, like the former technology of the canal locks meeting the former railroad tracks. There is also the convergence of the manmade canal with smaller brooks and streams. There is also convergence along the side where what used to be factories for industry along the canal (or railroad) have been converted into new apartments and shops. In these areas, the wildlife of the canal (frogs, birds, some fish) is particularly striking against the modern city, showing a good point of convergence.

This lesson should be taught in conjunction with the social studies teacher, who will be able to give more in-depth answers about the historical sites at the canal path and give a better explanation about the convergences that are seen. Ideally, the social studies teacher would take one class period to discuss the history and importance of the canal to build background knowledge.

**Lesson Plan:**

1. Break students into groups of five. Each group will have one chaperone; they must remain with the chaperone the whole time.

2. Give students a map of the area that they may explore on the canal path with their chaperones. Be sure that key historical locations are marked. (example: historic canal keeper’s home, historic canal lock system, Quinnipiac River, and the new businesses in the Factory Square.)

3. In small groups, students will explore the one mile area that is marked off on the map. With their notebooks and the Convergence Investigation sheet, the group must find one good example of convergence. (See attached worksheet).

4. Once they have found their convergence site, they should answer the following questions in their journal (on same worksheet):
   - What two things or ideas are coming together at this site?
   - Why is the convergence important? What does the convergence show about this location?
   - Have you ever noticed this spot before? Why or why not?
   - Take ten minutes to observe this spot carefully. Sit very still and observe using your senses. What do you notice? Record your observations on the table.
   - Freewrite for the remaining time at the location.

5. After about 30 minutes at the location, have students regroup and sit in two circles. The language arts teacher should guide one group while the social studies teacher guides the other group in a reflection. Have students share out what they learned about their convergence spot and why it is important using the four questions above. (10 minutes)
6. Close with the questions, “How does being aware of your surroundings make you a better writer? How did zooming in on your convergence site help you think about your location in a new way? Turn and talk to the person sitting next to you.” Share out to the whole group. (5 minutes)

**Assessment:** Journal entries, participation in group reflections
Additional Materials:

1. Index of Photographs, Images, and Maps:
   a. Photograph of Thoreau’s journal
   b. Photograph of the lock from Thoreau’s jail cell
      (photo credit: http://www.themorgan.org/sites/default/files/images/exhibitions/galleries/12-lock-and-key.jpg)
   c. Photograph of Walden Pond
   d. Photograph of Fairyland Pond
   e. Photo of Old North Bridge
   f. Photo of Concord River
      (photo credit: http://www.oars3rivers.org/sites/default/files/images/Concord.medium_0.jpg)
   g. Concord River Survey Map
      (photo credit: https://concordlibrary.org/uploads/scollect/Thoreau_surveys/107a/107a-d.jpg)
   h. Photograph of Egg Rock/River Convergence
      (photo credit: http://www.oars3rivers.org/sites/default/files/images/EggRock_center.medium.jpg)
   i. OARS map of convergence of Concord, Sudbury, and Assabet Rivers
      (photo credit: http://www.oars3rivers.org/river)

2. Index of Supplemental Worksheets and Excerpts:
   a. Belief Survey
   b. Passions and Philosophies Graphic Organizer
   c. Excerpt from “The Ponds” from Walden
   d. Excerpt from “Saturday” from A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers
   e. Convergence Word Work and Analysis Worksheet
   f. Convergence Site Directions Sheet
1. Photos and Images
Belief Statement Survey: Preparing to Learn about Thoreau

**Directions:** Read each statement and consider it carefully. Put a check mark in the box that most closely matches your point of view. Even if you are a little unsure, just pick the box that is the best match. In the space under the statement, jot down a short reason why you feel this way. *There is no right or wrong for any of these statements: this is YOUR opinion.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is okay to break a rule if nobody gets hurt.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Standing up for what you believe in is more important than following the rules.</td>
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<td>3. You should fight for what you believe in, even if it means you might get sent to jail for your opinion.</td>
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<td>4. The government should be able to tell citizens what is right and wrong by making laws.</td>
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<td>5. The best way to develop new ideas and learn new things is by spending time in nature.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Be prepared to share and explain your answers to the class!*
Thoreau’s Passions and Philosophies:  
What did Thoreau Stand For?

Directions:  Using the information from your article, add **two or three issues** on which Thoreau took a stand.  Think about what he was passionate about and cared about to help you find the issues. We will fill in the rest of the organizer as each group shares later in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue:</th>
<th>His Opinion/Stance:</th>
<th>Why This is Important:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
*If you finish your article before the rest of the class, discuss the issues below.

**Group Discussion Questions:**
- Do you think what Thoreau stood up for was important at the time? Why?
- Is the stance still important today? Why?
- Do you think Thoreau was brave to take this stance? Why?
Paragraph 5 from “The Ponds” chapter of Walden by Henry David Thoreau.

The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur, nor can it much concern one who has not long frequented it or lived by its shore; yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description. It is a clear and deep green well, half a mile long and a mile and three quarters in circumference, and contains about sixty-one and a half acres; a perennial spring in the midst of pine and oak woods, without any visible inlet or outlet except by the clouds and evaporation. The surrounding hills rise abruptly from the water to the height of forty to eighty feet, though on the southeast and east they attain to about one hundred and one hundred and fifty feet respectively, within a quarter and a third of a mile. They are exclusively woodland. All our Concord waters have two colors at least; one when viewed at a distance, and another, more proper, close at hand. The first depends more on the light, and follows the sky. In clear weather, in summer, they appear blue at a little distance, especially if agitated, and at a great distance all appear alike. In stormy weather they are sometimes of a dark slate–color. The sea, however, is said to be blue one day and green another without any perceptible change in the atmosphere. I have seen our river, when, the landscape being covered with snow, both water and ice were almost as green as grass. Some consider blue "to be the color of pure water, whether liquid or solid." But, looking directly down into our waters from a boat, they are seen to be of very different colors. Walden is blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both. Viewed from a hilltop it reflects the color of the sky; but near at hand it is of a yellowish tint next the shore where you can see the sand, then a light green, which gradually deepens to a uniform dark green in the body of the pond....
Excerpt from *A Week on The Concord and Merrimack Rivers* by Henry David Thoreau

From “Saturday,” paragraph 7

I have passed down the river before sunrise on a summer morning between fields of lilies still shut in sleep; and when, at length, the flakes of sunlight from over the bank fell on the surface of the water, whole fields of blossoms seemed to flash open before me, as I floated along, like the unfolding of a banner, so sensible is this flower to the influence of the sun’s rays.
Convergence: Word Work and Analysis
Directions: Complete the two sections below with your group members.

**Word Work:**

Step 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we think convergence means:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dictionary definition:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 2:

In the box below, illustrate the word convergence to show what it means. Use the example below as an example.
Analysis:
1. When you think about *convergence*, what makes the photos/map of the Egg Rock location so special?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

2. Symbolically, what might this *convergence* represent? Think big picture!
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

3. Can you think of a location where you have seen convergence in your own town, state, or life? Where do different parts of your existence blend together? Draw a picture of the place below. (Hint: It could be any place where two or more items, ideas, or forces meet. Think old meets new, technology meets nature, two different rivers meet, etc.)

   The Location:______________________________________________________________________

4. Why do you think the location above represents convergence? Why is that important?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
Convergence Site Directions Sheet

As a group, scout out what you think is the best example of convergence at the park. You can use your site map to help you. Once you agree on a site, find a quiet stop to observe the location carefully.

In your journal, answer the following:

- What two things or ideas are coming together at this site?
- Why is the convergence important? What does the convergence show about this location?
- Have you ever noticed this spot before? Why or why not?
- Take ten minutes to observe this spot carefully. Sit very still and observe using your senses. What do you notice? Record your observations.

Freewrite about the location for the remaining time. This should be at least 15 minutes.