

Examining Desperate and Deliberate Lives

The following lessons are designed to be used in connection with the study of *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer. The goal of the lessons is to address the overarching idea of Living a Deliberate Life. The lessons will ask students to study Henry David Thoreau's method of living deliberately, comparing Christopher McCandless' version of the same principle, and finally having students reflect on what living a deliberate life looks like today. The lessons can be taught in succession at the end of *Into the Wild* or spread out over the course of the novel.

Lesson 1

(Can be taught prior or reading *Into the Wild*)

Objective

The students will be able to determine how Henry David Thoreau would have defined living a deliberate life.

Essential Questions

- What does it mean to live deliberately?

Readings

Henry Builds a Cabin by D.B. Johnson

Selections from *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau

“Where I Lived and What I Lived For”

Materials Needed

Teacher copy of *Henry Builds a Cabin*

Photocopied reading of “Where I Lived and What I Lived For” for student annotation

Procedure

Class 1 (or homework)

Students will come to class having read and annotated the selection from *Walden*: “Where I Lived and What I Lived For”. Students should focus their annotations around what living a deliberate life looks, feels, and sounds like to Henry David Thoreau.

Class 2 (if Class 1 is done for homework)

Teacher will read to students *Henry Builds a Cabin* by D.B. Johnson and ask students how the children's book address living a deliberate life. Students should use their reading/annotation from the previous class (or homework assignment) to support their discussion of what ideals Thoreau is addressing when looking at how to live deliberately. Both what it means and what it also does not mean.

Assessment:

Students will map out Thoreau and his methods of living deliberately. This can be done through discussion, an exit ticket, or a paragraph response.

Lesson 2

(This lesson should be taught at least half way through *Into the Wild*)

Objective

The students will be able to analyze what living a deliberate life looked like to McCandless and compare and contrast it to Thoreau's definition of living deliberately.

Essential Questions

- Who is Thoreau, really?
- How is Thoreau misconstrued?

Readings

"Thoreau's Journal a Life of Listening" from *The Morgan Museum & Library* website
Selections from *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau
"Solitude"

Materials Needed

Access to computers with audio and internet access
Copies of "Solitude" from *Walden*
Copies of *Into the Wild*

Procedure

Prior to the start of class students should read and annotate the "Solitude" section of *Walden*. As they annotation they should pay attention to the solitude that Thoreau is seeking and how it is similar to and/or different from the solitude that McCandless is seeking in Alaska.

Students will start class by listening to selections from "Thoreau's Journal a Life of Listening" on *The Morgan Museum & Library* website. As students listen they should jot down notes on who Thoreau is. For example, a friend, surveyor, activist, etc.

The teacher will use this as a jumping off point to address who Thoreau really is. Teacher should highlight that Thoreau is a part of the Concord society(active in the life of his town) , he is a Surveyor (knows the land he is living on), friend (visits others and others visit him), activist, not a hermit (he is by no means alone in a cabin in the woods for an extended period of time), etc.... This should lead to a class discussion on the differences between Thoreau and McCandless. Does McCandless misconstrue Thoreau? How are the similar? How are the different?

Assessment:

Have students write a discussion between Thoreau and McCandless about what it means to live a deliberate life. They should use the notes from the class discussion as well as their annotation from “Solitude” and Lesson 1.

Lesson 3

(This lesson should be taught at the conclusion of the unit)

Objective

The students will be able to write a personal statement on what living a deliberate looks like today.

Essential Questions

- How can we practice living deliberately today?
- How do we practice living a deliberate life without falling into someone else’s rut?

Readings

Selections from *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau
Excerpts from “Conclusion”

Materials Needed

Copy of “Conclusion” from *Walden*

Procedure

Together as a class students and teacher should examine “Conclusion” starting with, “I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there...” and ending with “Now put the foundations under them”. The teacher should then lead a discussion with the class pulling in some of the following questions. What call of action does Thoreau put before us? What point is he trying to make when talking about his feet wearing a path from his door to the pond-side? What about when reflecting that it is still there 5 to 6 years later? Can we live a deliberate life by following someone else’s example or must we find an original version? When the teacher is satisfied he/she will assign students to write a personal statement on how can we practice living deliberately today.

Assessment

We can’t all build a cabin by the woods and we are not all going to take off for Alaska...So, how do we live deliberately today?

Sources

Johnson, D. B., and James Naughton. *Henry Builds a Cabin*. Weston Woods Studios, 2003.

Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*. Anchor Books, 2007.

“Thoreau's Journal: A Life of Listening.” *The Morgan Library & Museum*, 30 May 2017,

www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/online/thoreau.

Thoreau, Henry David, and Jonathan Levin. *Walden and, Civil Disobedience*. Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005.