

Getting on the Right Track (or ... Starting The School Year Deliberately)

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Goal: Students will apply the Thoreauvian ideal of living deliberately to promulgate a collaboratively-crafted code of classroom culture

Standards:

- * use close observation to draw evidence and inferences from texts, artifacts, and spaces.
- * determine the theme, ideas, and values expressed in complex texts.
- * engage in collaborative discussion, expressing ideas and building upon the ideas of others.
- * learn about key writers/philosophers in the American tradition.
- * consider the effect of technology on human and natural environments.
- * acquire and use general academic and domain-specific words.
- * write short opinion pieces, supporting a point of view with evidence and inferences.
- * grow in self-knowledge by identifying values important to growth and happiness.
- * articulate class aspirations and codes of conduct for the school year.
- * create art that expresses ideas and values.

Before you begin:

1. choose an object of significance to you, perhaps something you made, which is small enough to bring in. It should be an object that, through close observation, students can infer something about your priorities and values.

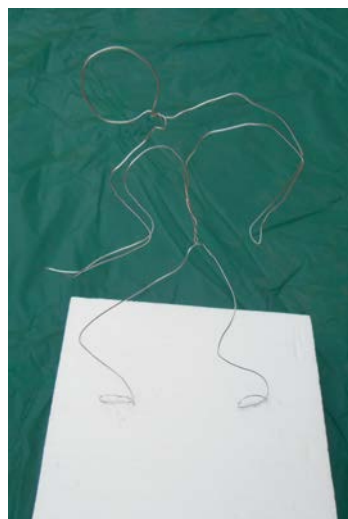
2. collect smooth river rocks of various sizes and a large cardboard tray (like the base of an appliance box) as a base for rock displays

3. arrange your classroom in a way that expresses your priorities. Does your arrangement suggest that group work is important? technology? autonomy? organization? reading? humor? nature? Write these 3 questions on your board: "What does this room tell you about our school? What does this room tell you about what we're going to be doing here this year? What does this room tell you about how I want you to act when you're in this space?"

4. arrange a place to meet with students that is not your classroom. Try to make sure students cannot access your classroom ahead of time.

5. other supplies to gather:

- timer
- chalk
- student writing supplies
- collaborative writing tools (flipchart, Promethean board, or whiteboard ...)
- 20-gauge wire (about \$5 per roll at Home Depot, 1 roll per full-sized class),
(cut into 4'-5' lengths, can be cut with regular scissors)
- squares of styrofoam, one per student



6. copy the reading passages (Attachments begin on page 10)

7. key words below are in all caps: feel free to use them as vocabulary words

8. you will need internet access and projector to show videos and photos

9. assessment: assessable products in this short unit include oral Q&A with teacher, writing, and two works of sculpture

PART I: Tracks and Traces

Objective: Students will study objects and spaces to ascertain human values and then make a work of art exemplifying one of the values.

Students will	Teacher will
sit in a circle in a space that is not the classroom	pose question: "if someone who lived long ago didn't write about themselves, how could we get to know them?"
turn and talk to discuss questions posed by the teacher with a neighbor	invite students to turn to a neighbor in dyads or triads and discuss, with a timer set at around 2 minutes
share ideas out with the whole group	invite students to share ideas
look closely at the key object from teacher's life	show students the key object from your life; allow students to come closer if needed
share ideas, pointing to specific aspects of the object to support the ideas	pose questions: "what can you tell about me from this object?" "what do you KNOW and what can you INFER?" "what is it about the ARTIFACT makes you say that?"

Students will	Teacher will
take writing tools into classroom	pass out writing tools and give directions: "you just read an object by looking very closely at it. Now we're going to read a whole space. I think you're ready to enter the classroom. We're going to enter silently. Without any talking, I want you to explore the space and then write about it, answering these 3 questions: 'What does this room tell you about our school? What does this room tell you about what we're going to be doing here this year? What does this room tell you about how I want you to act when you're in this space?' You will have 10 minutes for the silent exploring and the silent writing. The 3 questions are on the board in case you forget them. Are you ready?"
silently explore and find a spot to write	set timer for 10 minutes of silent exploring and writing

share ideas, pointing to specific aspects of the room to support the ideas	gather group back together; invite students to share their observations; appreciate inferences, appreciate different inferences from same evidence
save document, or label notebook with student name	make a chart with four columns labeled NOUNS, VERBS, ADVERBS, ADJECTIVES. As students share their observations, catalog the key words they say in the appropriate column. This way students see the correct spelling of the words they use ... For example, if a student says "I can tell you want us to read books quietly in this room" you write "read" under VERBS, "books" under NOUNS and "quietly" under ADVERBS

Students will	Teacher will
make suggestions to edit the list to eliminate overlap and hone the list of words to the most meaningful	pose question: "we have collected a lot of words! I want you to pretend that you're describing what is most important about this place to someone who is not here. Which words are the most important?"
	erase redundant or less meaningful words to distil the word collector to the most significant words
define, discuss, and distinguish the values	"These are the key words we have decided are the most important. They probably connect with the VALUES I hold most dear as a teacher, that are most important to you as students. I'm going to show you a list of possible values. Let's see if we can agree which 4 or 5 values are most strongly connected with the evidence you see in this room." Project or pass out the LIST OF VALUES below
come to consensus on the 4 or 5 values that are most suggested by the evidence in the room	record the 4 or 5 key values along with the key words
solo writing time to use the key words and values to write sentences beginning: "In this room we ..."	Write on the board: "In this room we ..." "Now I'm going to set the timer to 5 minutes and I want you to work alone to write a few sentences that put some of these key words and values together. Start your sentences with "In this room we ..." (Give an example if students need it, like "In this room we will

	make BEAUTIFUL art and show COMPASSION and CITIZENSHIP by putting art supplies back where they belong.") Set timer for 5 minutes.
share ideas by reading sentences out loud	listen for student reaction to sentences; write on the board/flipchart the sentences that the class likes the best

<h2>LIST OF POSSIBLE CLASSROOM VALUES</h2>
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|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Achievement | Fairness | Openness |
| Adventure | Friendships | Optimism |
| Autonomy | Fun | Peace |
| Beauty | Growth | Pleasure |
| Boldness | Happiness | Recognition |
| Compassion | Honesty | Respect |
| Challenge | Humor | Responsibility |
| Citizenship | Kindness | Security |
| Community | Knowledge | Self-Respect |
| Competency | Leadership | Self-Expression |
| Contribution | Learning | Service |
| Creativity | Love | Success |
| Curiosity | Loyalty | Trustworthiness |
| Determination | Meaningful Work | Wisdom |

Students will	Teacher will
students get up and get art supplies	distribute 1 length of wire and 1 chunk of styrofoam to each student
students fold their wire in half; at the fold twist an oval about the size of a quarter for the head ; then shape and pose the rest of the body, leaving the ends stuck out at the bottom to pierce into the styrofoam stand -- (arms need about 3.5 times the size of the head)	model your sample art (or photo of mine). "Now you're going to make a wire sculpture of you doing something in this room. See if you can depict one of our chosen values in how you shape your figure." allow 20 minutes for students to make the sculpture; play music in the classroom during art work time
students explain to teacher how the pose they have chosen exemplifies one of the activities and values	teacher circulates to help and admire

PART II: TRACKS AND TRAINS

Objective: Students will use literature and images of trains to reflect on the pace and direction of our work at school.

Students will	Teacher will
look at pictures of peaceful Walden Pond and the site of Henry's house	describe Henry David Thoreau's decision to move to the small house at Walden Pond to live simply and deliberately and finish writing the book about his river trip with his brother; he started another book while he lived there about his time at the pond.
look at pictures of train rushing by Walden Pond	Cars and planes hadn't been invented yet, but trains and train tracks were spreading across the country. The Fitchburg Line, along Walden Pond, just started running in 1844, just one year before Henry moved there, and the Transcontinental Railroad finally linked our country from coast to coast in 1869
discuss either with partners and share out, or with whole group	Questions for discussion: What do you think was in those railcars?
listen to sounds of Walden Pond without train, then with train	Questions for discussion: What do you think Walden Pond sounded like when no trains were going by? When trains were going by? (younger students can act sound the sounds of wind blowing and birds chirping and then the sounds of the train) PLAY VIDEOS:

[Peaceful Walden Pond](#)

(if link doesn't work, type in URL: <https://youtu.be/1GWLqICss0Y>)

[Train Rushing By Walden Pond](#)

(or enter URL: <https://youtu.be/Y6-OZbPs108>)

[Commuter Train at Walden Pond](#)

(or enter URL: <https://youtu.be/bQX4P2lcueU>)

Students will	Teacher will
read <u>Walden</u> excerpt about the train	Pass out copies of <u>Walden</u> excerpt or project for reading: "Here's what Henry David Thoreau wrote about the train"
	read as your students are able -- perhaps first reading is by teacher and then students are assigned numbered paragraphs to read
	Questions for discussion: According to what he wrote in <u>Walden</u> , what did Thoreau like about the train? What did he admire about the train? What did he dislike or resent about the train? Were the trains interruptions or company?
	More questions for discussion: What was the life of society like before the trains? How did trains change the pace of life? Were the trains pressing people to work faster, stay on track, coordinate their schedules? How did people get places on time before the trains?
	What do you think it was like to ride the train? And see parts of the country you had never seen before?
read <u>Night Journey</u>	Pass out copies of, or project for reading, the Roethke poem <u>Night Journey</u>

Students will	Teacher will
discuss either with partners and share out or whole group	More questions for discussion: who decides how fast the trains go? who decides how fast cars can go on the roads?
	Who decides how fast we work at school? How fast we are allowed to walk down the hall? What do you do when you want to work faster or slower than other people? Is it easy to change the pace?
	Who decides where the trains go? Trains can only go where the tracks are -- who lays the tracks?
revise "In this room we ..." sentences to include new understandings of the pace and direction of classwork	"Let's revisit the sentences we wrote to include some of these ideas of who sets the pace and direction for our class"

Students will	Teacher will
read short <u>Walden</u> quote and Emerson quote	in America, we have a fine tradition of wanting to think our own thoughts. Read Thoreau and Emerson quotes. Thoreau and Emerson were friends.
discuss either with partners and share out or whole group	Question for discussion: What do these two quotes have in common? When Henry wrote "Keep on your own track, then?" what is he comparing? He is comparing making your own choices with railroad tracks! He is saying you have to be in charge of sending your mind where you want it to go. He is using a METAPHOR comparing your choices with railroad tracks.
	Questions for discussion: If trains are thoughts ... do you have time at school to follow your TRAIN OF THOUGHT? How do you know when your thinking is ON TRACK? Who lays the tracks of your thinking?
reflective writing	Possible writing prompts: What do you do when other people aren't interested in the same things as you? What are you interested in doing and thinking about? What do you do when you want more time to think about something or do something than the teacher allows?

Students will	Teacher will
turn notebooks in for teacher response	write a thoughtful comment back in response to student reflection, making a connection if possible between what the student wrote and one of the selected VALUES for the classroom
reflect and edit classroom code if necessary	for next day, distill "In this class we ..." sentences into a classroom code to post in the room

PART III: ROCKING THE SCHOOL YEAR

Students will	Teacher will
look at pictures of the cairn at Henry's house site	after Henry David Thoreau died, people made a pile of rocks at the site where his small was -- it was meant to be a tribute to him to honor and remember him -- this pile of rocks is called a CAIRN
discuss either with partners and share out or whole group	Essential questions: why use rocks for this purpose? what traits and values do you connect with rocks? can you tell by looking at these photos what the rules are for participating in this activity? when people write a rock, who are they writing to? who do you think is going to read what they write?
look at pictures of rock art	More questions: why do people like to make stacks and arrangements of rocks? have you ever done this? what for? why are rocks interesting to stack?
pick a rock and write selected value(s) on it; stack with others' rocks	Introduce activity: "Look back at this list of classroom values. Which of them is particularly important for meaningful to you? Choose a rock you like and Pass out chalk for writing and allow students to stack

Students will	Teacher will
watch video	Here's another example of how meaningful rocks can be show Origin of "The Kindness Rocks Project" video, which can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK8iHsDXGvQ
decorate rocks with inspiring messages and hide around playground	would you like to use some of our rocks to leave messages for other students?