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NEH Landmarks

Living and Writing Deliberately: The Concord Landscapes and Legacy of Henry Thoreau CURRICULUM MINI UNIT: Living and Writing Deliberately

School Context: This mini-unit was developed for college preparatory and honors high school English courses at Natomas Charter School Performing and Fine Arts Academy (PFAA). PFAA is a public charter school in Sacramento, California, that integrates academics and the arts. PFAA is racially and economically diverse and because of its unique arts focus draws students from a wide geographical range in the greater Sacramento area. In the 2017-18 school year, PFAA is transitioning to an alternating block schedule; for the majority of courses, students will meet twice weekly for 85 minutes, and once weekly (on late-start Wednesdays) for 33 minutes.

Course Context: Juniors at PFAA take both United States History and English 11, which have interconnected curriculum throughout many parts of the year. Students are asked to consider related year-long inquiries in each class: what does it mean to be American as demonstrated in United States history, and what does it mean to be an American as demonstrated in American literature and the arts. Throughout the year, students are asked to make connections between what they are learning in each class.

In addition, in English class, students have developed a semester-long individual inquiry question, based on the question formulation technique (QFT) developed by Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana. As students encounter new texts, they are continually developing their response to this question, citing evidence from those texts. (Their response is the basis of their semester final.) This mini-unit includes opportunities for students to connect Thoreau's texts to this semester inquiry; however, a teacher could easily adapt these moments to serve other purposes.

A key activity in this course is the use of writing sprints to develop students' writing fluency and sense of voice. When students engage in sprints (usually anywhere from three to ten minutes), the only rule is to continue writing until the timer chimes, even if one is rewriting the prompt or a sentence already written. Sprints are intended to be a low-risk writing opportunity, and students are not asked to read out loud or exchange sprint responses with other students. Students are asked, however, to discuss ideas that come out of sprints, with the option of quoting themselves directly if desired. At the end of the semester, students will curate a small number of sprints to revise and share.

Another element of this course is the practice of annotating texts. This year, I will implement an annotation style based on the work of Kyrene Beers and Robert E. Probst in *Disrupting Thinking: Why How We Read Matters*. This method uses BHH (book, head, heart) as a means to

enter and analyze texts. This mini-unit asks students to use BHH when they annotate texts, but other methods of annotation could be substituted.

This mini-unit will take place in the second month of the school year, when students are well into their semester-long inquiry and already will have reviewed the abolitionist movement and the raid on Harper’s Ferry in their United States history course. Students will have written one reflective essay, and the culminating assignment in this unit will serve as a formative assessment of students’ ability to craft written arguments, which will be further developed in the subsequent unit. One note: in the middle of this unit, students will be completing and sharing a previously assigned interview project. I have included the details for this assignment, but obviously, this part of the mini-unit could be deleted or adapted for activities happening in your own course.

Unit Objectives: The goals of this mini-unit are as follows:

- To familiarize students with Henry David Thoreau’s importance as an American thinker and writer
- To challenge students to consider Thoreau’s relevance in their own lives, particularly when it comes to living and writing deliberately
- To demonstrate to students (through example and practice) the importance of reflection and revision on the writing process
- To develop students’ ability to create a strong sense of voice in their writing
- To formatively assess students ability to write a strong argument

The delivery of this unit will span four block periods over two weeks; however students will continue to work on a short, processed essay after the unit ends. If teachers would like to extend this unit, optional additional activities are included in some of the daily plans.

Quick Link to [Resource List](#)

Mini-unit Overview				
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Summary of Class Activities	Writing Deliberately: Notebooks, Journals, and The Role of Revision	Living Deliberately: Writing to Discover our Essential Truths	Discovering Voice: The Development of Thoreau’s Antislavery Texts	Finding Your Own Voice: Bridging the Gap between How You See the World and How You Act in It

Day 1--Writing Deliberately: Notebooks, Journals, and The Role of Revision

Standards Addressed	<p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5</u> (Develop writing by revision, rewriting and considering a new approach)</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10</u> (Write routinely over extended and shorter time frames)</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1</u> (Cite evidence to support analysis)</p>
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Students will complete a five-minute writing sprint as a bell-ringer activity (see slides for prompt).2. After sprint, students will be instructed about our next activity: a saunter. After a brief definition of the word “saunter,” students will be lead to an open area of campus (in this case a soccer field that abuts an open space) with notebooks in hand. Students will be instructed to “saunter” in silence until they hear me call them back (approximately 10 minutes). At the end of the saunter, they will be asked to repeat the writing sprint from the beginning of class. After the writing sprint, we will head back to class.3. Back in class, students will be asked to discuss in small groups how the two sprints were different. After 5-7 minutes of discussion, the whole class will reconvene for a short debriefing of conclusions.4. Teacher will lead discussion of Thoreau’s writing process (see slides). In theory, students should notice that their second writing sprint was possibly more complex, more creative, more reflective, etc. after walking. Points for discussion--effect of physical activity on thinking and writing; writing something a second time might lead to different ideas; effect of silence and/or mindfulness on thinking and writing processes.5. Possible extensions: Assign all or parts of Thoreau’s essay “Walking” and ask students to discuss and/or write about the role of physical movement and/or deliberation on the writing process. Share handout highlighting Thoreau’s revision of one paragraph from <u>Walden</u> and ask student to trace each change; ask student to consider the effect and purpose of each change.
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Writing sprints are not formally assessed as their purpose is to help students develop fluency and explore ideas in a low-stakes setting. (Some composition book entries will be shared at the end of the semester in a student-curated collection.)● Student understanding and engagement will be informally assessed according to their participation in the small and large group discussions. (Participation is tracked in this class based on frequency and quality of participation.)● Homework will be collected and assessed after next class period. Students should demonstrate close reading and analysis as evidenced by their annotations and responses to their selected texts.
Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Assign homework reading. (Due next class)

Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Google Slide Deck (contains information presented to students) ● Copies of Thoreau excerpts for homework ● Optional reading: Thoreau, Walking ● Optional handout highlighting Thoreau’s revision process
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Day 2-- Living Deliberately: Writing to Discover our Essential Truths	
Standards Addressed	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9 (Demonstrate knowledge of nineteenth-century foundational American literature)</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2 (Determine themes and central ideas from a text)</p>
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start with writing sprint based on homework (see slides). 2. After sprint, students will discuss in small groups, and then debrief as a class. Points for discussion: what can we infer about Thoreau’s values? In what ways are these values typically American (or not)? 3. Teacher will guide students through a brief overview of Thoreau’s concept of living deliberately, main tenets of Transcendentalism, and how conflicts in Thoreau’s time might relate to conflicts today (see slides). Students will participate in small group discussion, which will be followed with a whole class debriefing session. 4. Students will be given time to consider how the excerpts from Walden relate to their semester inquiry questions. This is a routine practice that will culminate in a semester final that asks students to answer a significant question they have about American culture using texts from the semester. (You may wish to omit or adapt this writing sprint to serve goals in your class.) 5. This day coincides with the due date for a long-term project in the class. (Details can be found here: What it Means to Be American Interview Project). As a segue to this activity, I will discuss how the Transcendentalist attention to the individual connects to the individual perspectives students have investigated in their interview projects. Students will be asked to find a partner and share the visual component of their project without discussing any aspect of it. Their partner will draw conclusions about their interview subject, and write those conclusions on a sticky note, which they will affix to the back of the visual. Students will rotate partners until they have 5-7 sticky notes. To conclude the activity, students will be asked to do one final writing sprint for the day in which they consider to what extent their visual component successfully communicated ideas from their interview. 6. Assign homework (Read and annotate excerpt from “Civil Disobedience”)
Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Writing sprints are not formally assessed as their purpose is to help students develop fluency and explore ideas in a low-stakes setting. (Some composition book entries will be shared at the end of the

	<p>semester in a student-curated collection.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student understanding and engagement will be informally assessed according to their participation in the small and large group discussions. (Participation is tracked in this class based on frequency and quality of participation.) • Interview projects will be assessed based on rubric (linked in project directions). Specific to this mini-unit, student responses in the final writing sprint will be used as a formative assessment to determine whether students understand the basic tenets of Transcendentalism and can apply that understanding to the work presented by their peers. This formative assessment will enable teacher to adjust instruction for the next class meeting.
Follow-up Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and annotate excerpt from “Civil Disobedience”
Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Slide Deck (contains information presented to students) • One copy of excerpt from “Civil Disobedience for each student (for homework)

Day 3--Discovering Voice: The Development of Thoreau’s Antislavery Texts	
Standards Addressed	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4 (Close reading of a text with attention to word choice and tone)</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1 (Cite evidence to support analysis of a text)</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9 (Examine how multiple texts from the same period approach topics)</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.8 (Evaluate reasoning in works of public advocacy)</p>
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher will review concept of voice in writing, specifically focusing on the relationship between diction and tone. As a class, we will analyze one example paragraph as a model. Then, students will begin small group discussion regarding diction and tone from the rest of the homework reading. While students are conducting first discussion, I will circle the room, stamping complete homework and informally assessing understanding based on each group’s discussion. The whole class will debrief after group discussion. 2. The class will then be divided in half; one half will receive excerpts from “Slavery in Massachusetts” and one half will receive excerpts from “A Plea for Captain John Brown.” Students will be given approximately 20 minutes to read and annotate silently, paying attention to diction and tone, and how it furthers Thoreau’s argument. (Option, especially for students with less confidence reading Thoreau: students will form pairs and pair read/annotate.) 3. After students have read and annotated independently, they will

	<p>discuss in their table groups, sharing annotations.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Transition--students will receive the excerpt they did not yet read. Repeat activity (independently read, annotate, and then discuss in small groups.) 5. Before we debrief, students will individually answer the following question in writing (to be turned in at end of class): In what order did Thoreau write these texts? What evidence from his diction and tone can you use to support your stand? Cite at least two quotations from different texts in your answer. (I will allow students about 7 minutes to write and 2 or 3 minutes to share with a partner). 6. As a class, we will discuss how Thoreau’s ideas developed among the three texts we looked at today. Hopefully, students will recognize that his tone becomes progressively more strident. They should be able to cite how the same images and analogies are revised over time. 7. As we wrap up, I will remind students how frequent writing and revision can help a writer develop a strong voice. (Students are drafting a reflective essay that was started before this unit. If time allows, students will be asked to rewrite the introduction to their reflective essays from memory as an exercise in rethinking and rewriting.)
Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While students are conducting first discussion, I will circle the room, stamping complete homework and informally assessing understanding based on each group’s discussion. • As individuals and groups are discussing texts, I will circulate and informally assess for understanding. • I will collect students individual responses and formatively assess their ability to relate diction and tone to author’s purposes and their ability to accurately and effectively cite evidence in their own work. (We will have just begun a year-long research project, so this will help me determine how much reteaching I need to do for this skill.) • (When reflective essays are due, one of the rubric standards will address voice.)
Follow-up Actions	Homework: Students should go back to their reflective essay drafts (due next class period) and revise to develop a distinct voice.
Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student copies of anti-slavery excerpts (“Slavery in Massachusetts” and “A Plea for Captain John Brown”) • Slide deck

Day 4--Finding Your Own Voice: Bridging the Gap between How You See the World and How You Act in It	
Standards Addressed	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1</u> (Write arguments to support claims) <u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4</u> (Produce clear and coherent writing that

	is appropriate for a specific audience)
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher will briefly review Question Formulation Technique (QFT) process (Rothstein and Santana). 2. Students will be presented with a Venn diagram with two overlapping sections: The way I see the world/The way I act in the world. This diagram will become the focus for the QFT process. 3. In small groups, students will brainstorm questions for approximately 5-7 minutes. Students will be asked to stop and analyze and prioritize questions according to QFT process. 4. Groups will share and explain their prioritized questions with the rest of class, followed by some discussion about how these questions might apply to contemporary American culture. Teacher will shift discussion to how American society reflects the conflicts brought out in the questions. 5. Students will be asked to choose one question (from any group) and answer it in a writing sprint (5-7 minutes). 6. Teacher will share back page of one of Thoreau’s journals, on which he listed his “faults.” Teacher will facilitate quick discussion about how each item might be seen as a fault and how it might diminish a writer’s sense of voice. Special emphasis will be given to last item regarding conciseness. 7. Teacher will assign formal written response, challenging students to both be concise and demonstrate a strong voice in a piece of writing. Students will be asked to write a short (no more than 400 word) revision of either their sprint from day one of this unit or the sprint just completed. Due date to be determined.
Assessments	Students’ responses will be formally assessed using a rubric that addresses two key elements: clarity of argument and development of voice.
Follow-up Actions	Collect typed, revised essays on a day appropriate to your class. If desired, schedule a time for a draft workshop.
Materials Needed	Slide deck

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