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 Kylene 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**

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### Standards Addressed

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5**: Develop writing by revision, rewriting and considering a new approach
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10**: Write routinely over extended and shorter time frames
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1**: Cite evidence to support analysis

### Activities

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 *Walden* and ask student to trace each change; ask student to consider the effect and purpose of each change.

### Assessment

- 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

- Assign homework **reading**. (Due next class)
### Day 2— Living Deliberately: Writing to Discover our Essential Truths

| Standards Addressed | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9 (Demonstrate knowledge of nineteenth-century foundational American literature)  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2 (Determine themes and central ideas from a text) |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Activities          | 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         | 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 |

### Materials Needed
- **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
- 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
- Read and annotate excerpt from “Civil Disobedience”

### Materials Needed
- Google Slide Deck (contains information presented to students)
- One copy of excerpt from “Civil Disobedience for each student (for homework)

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### Day 3--Discovering Voice: The Development of Thoreau’s Antislavery Texts

#### Standards Addressed
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4 (Close reading of a text with attention to word choice and tone)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1 (Cite evidence to support analysis of a text)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9 (Examine how multiple texts from the same period approach topics)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.8 (Evaluate reasoning in works of public advocacy)

#### Activities
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
discuss in their table groups, sharing annotations.

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

- 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

- 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**

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1 (Write arguments to support claims)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 (Produce clear and coherent writing that)
### Activities

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
Sources Consulted


Living and Writing Deliberately
Day One
People tend to have very different ideas about what it means to be American and which American values are most important.

What is the most important American value to you?

Describe this value and explain why it is important to you.
saunter

- Denotation?
  - “to walk in a slow or leisurely manner” (Merriam-Webster)

- Connotations?
We are about to become saunterers:

- Bring your composition book and a writing utensil.
- Rules:
  - You may not speak or otherwise communicate to anyone during our saunter.
  - Stay within sight and earshot of class.
  - Try to notice.
In table groups, discuss--

Compare and contrast your two writing sprints.

In what ways did the content of the sprints differ?

In what ways was the way you wrote different?
Henry David Thoreau

- American Writer, Scientist, and Philosopher, and Abolitionist in the mid-nineteenth century.
- Held strong beliefs about “sauntering”
- Walden
Henry David Thoreau, from *Walden*

“I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”
Henry David Thoreau, from *Walden*

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”
Henry David Thoreau

Writing process included--
- Walking
- Taking notes
- Reflecting on notes
- Recopying notes into journals
- Discussing ideas
- Delivering speeches about ideas
- Publishing ideas
Evolution of an Idea*

- **Journal, 30 June 1840**
  “A man’s life should be a stately march to a sweet but unheard music, and when to his fellows it shall seem irregular and inharmonious, he will only be stepping to a livelier measure, or his nicer ear hurry him into a thousand symphonies and concordant variations.

- **A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1849)**
  “Marching is when the pulse of the hero beats in unison with the pulse of Nature, and he steps to the measure of the universe; then there is true courage and invincible strength”

www.walden.org
Evolution of an Idea*

- **Journal, 14 July 1851**
  - “For years I marched as to a music in comparison with which the military music of the streets is noise and discord.”

- **Journal, 19 July 1851**
  - “Let a man step to the music which he hears, however measured.”

- **Journal, 25 July 1851**
  - “I am bothered to walk with those who wish to keep step with me. It is not necessary to keep step with your companion, as some endeavor to do.”


www.walden.org
Evolution of an Idea*

- **Walden Draft Version 6**
  - “Let a man step to the music which he hears, however measured and however far away.

- **Walden (1854)**
  - “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

www.walden.org
Writing *deliberately*

- Etymology: from “libra”
  - “scales”: to weigh, ponder, or consider
- How was Thoreau’s process a *deliberate* one?
- How do you deliberate when you write?
Homework

× **Read** THREE of the SIX excerpts from Thoreau’s book *Walden*.

× **Read deliberately**: 
  × In other words, ANNOTATE
  × Mark up the text with BHH** responses

*no late work will be accepted on this assignment

**Respond to the **book** (What did the author do? What does the author assume about you? What is in the text?), to your **head** (What does this text make you think? What inferences can you make? Where can you challenge the author’s assumptions?), and to your **heart** (How does this make you feel? How can you relate? What might you do differently?)
(Optional)
To extend your understanding...

× **Read** Thoreau’s essay, “Walking”

× **Analyze** Thoreau’s revision process in this paragraph from *Walden*.

× **Read deliberately***:
  × In other words, **ANNOTATE**
  × Mark up the text with BHH** responses
Writing Sprint

Examine your annotations on the excerpts you read for homework.

*Based on your annotations and highlights, what can you infer about Thoreau’s beliefs about the world?*

(How did Thoreau express these ideas? In what ways is his language effective?)
In table groups, discuss--

Share at least one of the quotations you highlighted in your homework.

What can you infer about Thoreau’s values?

To what extent are these values typically American? (or not?)
What does it mean to “live deliberately”? 

What kinds of problems or questions require “deliberation”? 

What happens when you have to make a choice between two rights? Between two wrongs?
What does it mean to “live deliberately”?

What is happening in mid-nineteenth century America that might require deliberation?

- Industrialization and changes in job markets
- Less uniformity in religion
- Increased literacy and political interests
- Increasing conflicts over slavery in the South
- Major economic shifts among classes
- Rapid technological advances (especially in communication and transportation)
What does it mean to “live deliberately”?

People in the nineteenth-century have increasingly more choices about their lives. Why might this require “deliberation”?

What happens when people live without deliberation?
In table groups, discuss--

In what ways do people **today** live deliberately?

In what ways do people **today** fail to live deliberately?

What are the consequences of either practice?
Transcendentalism

- Philosophical movement in mid-nineteenth century
- Ralph Waldo Emerson and his circle
- Main tenets:
  - Individualism and Self-knowledge
  - Intuition (versus reason)
  - Interconnectedness (and thus importance of equity and human rights)
  - Importance of nature
Transcendentalism

A major conflict (as seen by transcendentalists):

● As humans, we have a strong need to belong to a community and to be loved and accepted by it.

● As humans, we have a strong need to be unique and autonomous.

Why is this a conflict?
Transcendentalism and American Values

- How does this conflict play out in American history and culture?
Writing Sprint

Review your semester inquiry question.

In what ways might Thoreau’s ideas from Walden provide answers to your inquiry question? (If possible cite evidence from the excerpts in your response.)
1. To what extent did your visual component succeed in communicating your conclusions?

   If the sticky notes seem to “get it,” what can you identify that you did well?

   If some people did not seem to “get it,” what could you do differently to more successfully communicate your ideas?

2. Thinking about the projects you viewed, can you connect any ideas to Transcendentalist ideas? Explain.
Homework

× **Read** excerpt from Thoreau’s essay, “Civil Disobedience.”

× **Read deliberately**: 
  × In other words, ANNOTATE 
  × Mark up the text with BHH**

responses

*no late work will be accepted on this assignment

**Respond to the **book** (What did the author do? What does the author assume about you? What is in the text?), to your **head** (What does this text make you think? What inferences can you make? Where can you challenge the author’s assumptions?), and to your **heart** (How does this make you feel? How can you relate? What might you do differently?)
Day Three
Voice

• Voice in writing is multifaceted. Remember--it is what makes our writing sound like it comes from a unique individual and not a machine.

• What factors contribute to voice?

Today, we are going to focus on two related factors:

• Diction
• Tone
I HEARTILY ACCEPT the motto, — "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe, — "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.
In table groups, discuss--

Review Thoreau’s essay, “Civil Disobedience.”

Discuss examples where Thoreau’s diction impacts the tone of his essay. How do his diction and his tone work to create a unique sense of voice in his essay?

Based on this essay, what kind of person does he seem to be?
Close Reading

Two more Thoreau texts:
- “Slavery in Massachusetts”
- “A Plea for Captain John Brown”

Take the next 20 minutes to closely read and annotate the text you have been given.

Note where Thoreau’s diction affects his tone. How does his tone reveal his purpose?
In table groups, discuss--

- Share out examples that you annotated.
- As a group determine the dominant tone(s) in the text you read.
- Be prepared to cite evidence that demonstrates this tone.
- Then, determine what you think is Thoreau’s purpose in writing this text.
Close Reading

Now read the other text:

- “Slavery in Massachusetts”
- “A Plea for Captain John Brown”

Take the next 20 minutes to closely read and annotate the text you have been given.

Note where Thoreau’s diction affects his tone. How does his tone reveal his purpose?
In table groups, discuss--

- Share out examples that you annotated.
- As a group determine the dominant tone(s) in the text you read.
- Be prepared to cite evidence that demonstrates this tone.
- Then, determine what you think is Thoreau’s purpose in writing this text.
Writing Sprint

On a separate sheet of paper, respond to the following prompt--

After reading and analyzing Thoreau’s tone in the three texts from today, make an educated guess as to the chronological order of these texts. Explain how his developing tone helped you determine the order. Be sure to quote and cite AT LEAST two pieces of evidence in your response.
Thoreau’s Developing Tone

- How did you determine the chronological order?

How do rethinking, rewriting, and revision help a writer develop a sense of voice?
Homework

× **Revise** your reflective essay draft (due next class meeting).

× **Be deliberate:**
  × Read your draft OUT LOUD (to anyone or anything (your best friend, your cat, your cactus?)
  × Does it sound like you?
  × If not, revise to establish your unique voice.
Day Four
QFT Process Review

Step 1: In left-hand column, list all questions that come to mind. Do not answer, discuss, or edit (other than to ensure a question is being asked, rather than a statement)

Step 2: Mark questions with an O (Open) or C (Closed) and rewrite to opposite in right-hand column

Step 3: Discuss and prioritize questions
QFT Focus

The Way I View the World

The Way I Act in the World
Perception and Action Gaps

In what ways do Americans have gaps between the ways we view the world (or purport to view the world) and the ways we act in the world?

Contemporary examples?
Writing Sprint

Choose ONE of the questions from our QFT process.

Answer that question based on your knowledge, experiences, and/or beliefs.
Don’t forget Thoreau--

According to a list in the back of a journal:

“My faults are
Paradoxes--saying just the opposite, a
style which may be imitated--
Ingenious--
Playing with words--getting the
laugh--not always simple strong & broad
Using current phrases -- & maxims when I
should speak for myself
Don’t forget Thoreau--

According to Thoreau (continued):
“My faults are . . . .
Not always earnest
In short--in fact--alas &c
Want of conciseness--”

Thoreau wrote MILLIONS of words in his journals and distilled them to a short list of publications.
Your Assignment

- **Choose** EITHER your sprint from our first day OR your sprint from today.
- **Rethink, rewrite, and revise** your response to create a brief argument that maintains a clear, distinct voice.
- **Be concise:** your final draft should be typed in MLA and be NO MORE than 400 words.
Credits

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

- Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
- Photographs by Unsplash
- Watercolor textures by GraphicBurguer