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Lessons for Creative Nonfiction, grade 12

These lessons will be included in our unit on the personal essay. This will address moving from factual description of the concrete place to description based on visual text, to meditation, and then social commentary as prefatory scaffolding activity that might be used for either the personal essay or a later unit, the culture essay

Thread: "Being Awake, Aware, Alive"

Essential Questions:

What does it mean to be 'awake, aware, alive'?

How can one manipulate one's environment and use of language to convey a sense of being 'awake, aware, alive' to readers?

How can concrete experience be transformed into philosophical thought?

Materials:

Thoreau's *Journal*, excerpts from Volume 2 of Princeton Univ Press edition, fall 1846, pp. 278-279

"Ktaadn" from *The Maine Woods* Library of American edition, pp 633-635

Painting of Mt. Ktaddan by Frederic Edwin Church (1853), available on <http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/9156>

New Jersey standards for Reading Literature

NJSLSA.R1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences and relevant connections from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

NJSLSA.R2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

NJSLSA.R4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

NJSLSA.R6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

NJSLSA.R7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

NJSLSA.R9. Analyze and reflect on how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Progress Indicators for Reading Literature

RL.11-12.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence and make relevant connections to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.11-12.2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.11-12.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (e.g., Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

RL.11-12.5. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

RI.11-12.7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

RI.11-12.10. By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at grade level text-complexity or above with scaffolding as needed.

By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at grade level text-complexity or above.

New Jersey Standards for Writing

NJSLSA.W2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

NJSLSA.W3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

NJSLSA.W4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

NJSLSA.W5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Progress Indicators for Writing

W.11-12.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

1. Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
2. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
3. Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).
4. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

W.11-12.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. W.11-12.5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, trying a new approach, or consulting a style manual, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

New Jersey Standards for Language

NJSLSA.L5. Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

NJSLSA.L6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

Progress Indicators for Language

L.11-12.3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

1. Vary syntax for effect, apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts.

L.11-12.5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

1. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.
2. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

Lesson 1:

Introduction: As cited in the Concord Museum's catalog, Thoreau wrote in his 1860-1861

Journal: "All this is perfectly distinct to an observant eye, and yet could easily pass unnoticed by most."

In our daily lives we are immersed in places, some familiar, and occasionally new and striking. Writing a personal or culture essay depends to a large degree on conveying what the "observant eye" captures, both in terms of concrete place description and the reactions they inspire, and by transformation, to meditative and even philosophical thought.

(This lesson may require two class periods)

Procedure

1. Journal response: what does it mean to be "awake, aware, alive?" How are you/are you not "awake, aware, alive" in relation to your environment? How can one become more so?
2. Read Journal excerpt, pp. 278-279. Respond to text: what are the dominant images conveyed? What is Thoreau "awake, aware, alive" to? Activity: choose element to focus on and expand text. Share responses.
3. Activity: close reading and analysis of Thoreau's expanded description on pp 632-634 of "Ktaadn" in *The Maine Woods*, Library of America edition.
4. Think-pair-share: each pair focuses on one aspect of the description. Identify diction, syntax, figurative language, tone, etc. Written response: how does Thoreau's textual development convey thematic/meditative elements? Which specific textual passages provide support? What are the characteristics of place expanded upon? How are those characteristics expanded figuratively?
5. Large group sharing/discussion
6. Visual text:



Response: What elements of Ktaadn are similar to Thoreau's description? What elements differ? How do the written and visual texts suggest similar/different philosophical responses?

Homework: Be "awake, aware, alert" to your surroundings. Choose a place/activity to take notes on as you are experiencing it.

Lesson two:

(standards repeated from lesson one)

Procedure:

1. Cooperative learning: In groups of three, share homework; respond to one another's notes by identifying the central feeling conveyed through the notes.
2. Discussion: how can the work be expanded upon to convey the experience more fully? What does the writer want to focus upon about the experience? What does it make him/her "awake, aware, alive" to? What characteristics are suggested by the concrete elements described?
3. Writing: expand notes to a narrative/meditative/philosophical piece?
4. Workshop writing; what is successful in conveying central theme based upon place? What can be strengthened through use of diction, figurative language, tone, etc?

Assessment: draft of approximately 2-3 pages, evaluated in terms of the transition from the concrete to the abstract. Draft will ultimately be incorporated in writer's personal or cultural essay.