



SKETCHING DELIBERATELY

a four-week sketchbook exploration
inspired by the writing
of Henry David Thoreau

developed by
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BUILDING ON THE EXAMPLE AND WRITINGS OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU...

HOW CAN STUDENTS BE ENCOURAGED/INSPIRED TAKE ON THE PRACTICE OF KEEPING A SKETCHBOOK?

HOW CAN THE PRACTICE OF KEEPING A SKETCHBOOK HELP STUDENTS BE AWAKE TO THEIR OWN LIVES?

Henry David Thoreau began keeping a journal in 1837. He stopped keeping his journal 25 years, 7000 manuscript pages and 2 million words later. Thoreau's journals--along with his writings on various trips and his two years at Walden Pond--offer us insight into his daily life, but those daily thoughts were also sometimes reworked into essays and other published writings. The journal page was where he took time to ponder, reflect and discuss the pieces of his own life and the social and cultural life of his community and world.

Through a four-week selection of brief readings and five-minute "bell-ringer" sketchbook activities to be completed daily in class, students will practice setting aside time each day for intentional thought and creative activity in a sketchbook. The four-week scope of the activities should help students begin to adopt the habit of daily sketchbook/journal reflection. A sketchbook prompt is given for each day, though there are many other ways that the reading selection can be interpreted.

These exercises can be adapted for multiple age groups and levels of art skill. Remember that the process is as important as the product.

Materials Needed

Reading selections and prompts for four weeks (below)

Sketchbook for each student

Pencil/pen for each student

Other art materials as desired:

Markers

Collage materials: magazines, newspapers,

Scissors

Glue

Colored pencils

'What are you doing now?' he asked. 'Do you keep a journal?'

So I make my first entry today"

Thoreau's first journal entry, October 22, 1837



Notes:

Each student will need a sketchbook (with at least 20 pages or 20 page-spreads, more if you choose to take the sketchbook forward) and a drawing tool (pen or pencil). You may choose to give students their sketchbooks to keep for the entire time or pass out and collect the sketchbooks each day. Additional available art materials will give students fuller range of expression. You may have all materials available every day or have only one or two additional materials each day.

Sharing the quote

You may choose to photocopy all four weeks of readings and prompts and give to each student along with the sketchbook. Another option is to share the reading selection daily as students begin the process. The quote might be posted on a classroom electronic bulletin board, projected on a classroom screen or photocopied individually so that students can collage the photocopied quote into their sketchbooks.

The process

This activity is designed to stimulate thinking and get students working in the first five minutes of class. Keeping students moving is part of the process. Don't let students bog down in the drive for perfection. As Thoreau did with his writings, these daily sketches can be re-worked into more complete statements. Each day pass out materials as needed, deliver the quote to the student and at the end of five minutes have the students conclude their work. You might have them leave the sketchbooks open as they begin their other work so you can see what they have done and talk with them about their responses.

Evaluating the sketchbook

Because these are designed to be quick exercises, evaluation should focus more on process than product. Sketchbook pages may not be of the highest quality of drawing, but if students are proposing and developing ideas, that is a successful sketchbook assignment. If you are grading the project, consider giving weekly progress grades (did the student work every day for the assigned period, did the student attempt more than a surface response to the quote and prompt, did the student take a unique path in responding) and then assigning a grade for the entire sketchbook (looking at growth overall, at whether later attempts showed more engagement and effort, etc.).

Taking the sketchbook forward

The final quote is Thoreau's exhortation to think one's own thoughts. Encourage students to continue to use the sketchbook as an opportunity for daily reflection. You may want to make additional assignments or offer incentives (extra credit, maybe) to keep students working in the sketchbook using their own thoughts as the prompt. You might make random checks rather than assigned due dates to encourage students to keep up daily with their sketchbook work rather than rushing to meet a due date. You may also encourage students to use their sketchbook ideas as the basis for longer, more finished works.





Week One

Monday

'What are you doing now?' he asked. 'Do you keep a journal?' So I make my first entry today" Thoreau's first journal entry, October 22, 1837
Because this sketchbook is really about you, make your first entry a contour drawing of yourself. Look into a mirror and draw what you see.

Tuesday

Many an object is not seen, though it falls within the range of our visual ray, because it does not come within the range of our intellectual ray, i.e. we are not looking for it. So, in the largest sense, we find only the world we look for. ~ Journal, July 2, 1857
Find a familiar object around you (a book or pencil, your shoes or backpack) and draw a small section of it (for example, the zipper of a backpack or just the laces of shoes). Look at the familiar object in a new way.

Wednesday

Many college text-books which were a weariness and a stumbling-block when studied, I have since read a little in with pleasure and profit. ~ Journal, February 19, 1854
Think back to a book you have read (and perhaps not especially enjoyed) as a class assignment. Create a sketchbook page about that book - what you remember. Add a date that you might go back and re-read it for pleasure (and maybe even profit!).

Thursday

When I consider that the nobler animal have been exterminated here - the cougar, the panther, lynx, wolverine, wolf, bear, moose, deer, the beaver, the turkey and so forth and so forth, I cannot but feel as if I lived in a tamed and, as it were, emasculated country... Is it not a maimed and imperfect nature I am conversing with? I take infinite pains to know all the phenomena of the spring, for instance, thinking that I have here the entire poem, and then, to my chagrin, I hear that it is but an imperfect copy that I possess and have read, that my ancestors have torn out many of the first leaves and grandest passages, and mutilated it in many places. ~Journal, March 23, 1856
Find an image of a species that is entirely extinct or that used to live in the area where you live but is not found there any more. Draw the animal or a symbol of that animal as a missing piece in the world.

Friday

A traveller! I love his title. A traveler is to be revered as such. His profession is the best symbol of our life. Going from-toward; it is the history of every one of us. ~Journal, July 2, 1851
It is Friday! From what have you traveled this week? Toward what are you going this weekend? Create a sketchbook page about your week's journey.



Week Two

Monday

I thrive best on solitude. If I have had a companion only one day in a week, unless it were one or two I could name, I find that the value of the week to me has been seriously affected. It dissipates my days, and often it takes me another week to get over it. ~ Journal, December 28, 1856
Create a sketchbook page about solitude - being by yourself. Do you like having only yourself for company? How can you symbolize the presence and/or absence of other people?

Tuesday

The question is not what you look at, but what you see. ~ Journal, August 5, 1851
Find another familiar object and draw it in your sketchbook in such a way that you help people see it differently.

Wednesday

Talk about slavery! It is not the peculiar institution of the South. It exists wherever men are bought and sold, wherever a man allows himself to be made a mere thing or a tool, and surrenders his inalienable rights of reason and conscience. Indeed, this slavery is more complete than that which enslaves the body alone. ~ Journal, December 4, 1860
Create a page in your sketchbook about something that enslaves people today. Remember Thoreau's insight that slavery can mean more than an enslaved body. Use words, images, symbolic colors, whatever you need to convey your subject.

Thursday

It is in vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves. There is none such. It is in the bog in our brains and bowels, the primitive vigour of Nature in us, that inspires that dream. I shall never find in the wilds of Labrador any greater wildness than in some recess of Concord, i.e. than I import into it. ~Journal, August 30, 1856
Concord, MA, was Thoreau's home town. Do you think of your hometown as being "wildness"? In your sketchbook depict how your hometown has made you the person you are.

Friday

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This is the same quote from yesterday. Thoreau says that the dream comes from within us, from what Nature has given us. Do you have a dream? If so, create a page in your sketchbook about that. If you haven't yet decided what your dream is, think about how you can depict the process of identifying that dream and then making it a reality.





Week Three

Monday

I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself than be crowded on a velvet cushion. ~Walden, Economy

Create an image of yourself sitting on a pumpkin (or choose another fruit or vegetable).

Tuesday

"Every part of nature teaches that the passing away of one life is the making room for another. The oak dies down to the ground, leaving within its rind a rich virgin mould, which will impart a vigorous life to an infant forest. The pine leaves a sandy and sterile soil, the harder woods a strong and fruitful mould. So this constant abrasion and decay makes the soil of my future growth. As I live now so shall I reap. If I grow pines and birches, my virgin mould will not sustain the oak; but pines and birches, or, perchance, weeds and brambles, will constitute my second growth. ~Journal, October 24, 1837

Thoreau says that the way we live now determines what our next growth will be. Consider the kind of life you are living now. Based on that, what do you think your next growth will be? Represent that anticipated growth in some way in your sketchbook.

Wednesday

It is not enough to be industrious; so are the ants. What are you industrious about? ~letter to Harrison Blake (November 16, 1857)

What keeps you busy? What parts of your busy-ness would you like to eliminate from your life? Create two images side by side: one of your busy life, one of life as you wish to live it.

Thursday

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. ~Walden, Conclusion

What will you look like as you advance confidently in the direction of your dreams? Create that image in your sketchbook.

Friday

Nature is full of genius, full of the divinity; so that not a snowflake escapes its fashioning hand. ~Journal, January 5, 1856

Create at least 5 different snowflake designs. Draw them, cut them from folded paper or create them in some other way. Make each one an individual.



Week Four

Monday

I felt that it would be to make myself the laughing-stock of the scientific community to describe to them that branch of science which specially interests me, in as much as they do not believe in a science which deals with the higher law. So I was obliged to speak to their condition and describe to them that poor part of me which alone they can understand. The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot. Now I think of it, I should have told them at once that I was a transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanation. ~ Journal, March 5, 1853

How does it feel when you are not understood? Create a page in your sketchbook that shows how that feels. Use lines, words, colors, images.

Tuesday

What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on? ~letter to Harrison Blake (May 20, 1860)

How do you imagine the state of our planet? Create an image that shows a house on planet Earth as you imagine it.

Wednesday

"Any fool can make a rule

And any fool will mind it." ~Journal, February 3, 1860

What does it look like when a fool obeys a foolish rule? Create that image.

Thursday

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. ~Walden, Where I Lived, and What I Lived For

Turn Thoreau's words into an image in your sketchbook: time as a stream with a sandy bottom, fish in the sky, a sky pebbly with stars.

Friday

Do not seek expressions. Seek thoughts to be expressed. ~Journal, December 25, 1851

Thoreau understood that each of us should be awake and alive to the world in which we live. We should not just echo others' thoughts. We should be thinking our own thoughts. Take what you know about yourself and about the world and each day write your own thoughts and create your own drawings. You may want to conclude this portion of your sketchbook activities by creating another portrait of yourself. How do you think it will be different from the self-portrait you did on the first day of the sketchbook project?

