

Examining Desperate and Deliberate Lives: A Curriculum Unit for Grade 11, American Literature

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Overview:

As Americans in a modern world, we often find ourselves swept along in the tide of “Americanism.” The pressure to become bigger, better, faster, or stronger drives us toward and through decisions and experiences, often without concern for the unanticipated outcomes. And yet, we are bombarded with books and apps that suggest we should slow down and “breathe.” This modern paradox is echoed in John Steinbeck’s 1966 essay, “Paradox and Dream”** in which Steinbeck recognizes that “we seem to be in a state of turmoil all the time, both physically and mentally.” The fast pace of the American experience in a modern world prevents us from ever being satisfied with the life we live as members of this complex community.

Henry David Thoreau, writing more than 100 years before Steinbeck, was concerned with this very state of constant turmoil in which we lead lives of “quiet desperation” (*Walden*). But, unlike his fellow critic, Thoreau offers his readers a model for action: *Live Deliberately*. According to Thoreau, we do not need to remain mired in our “vague yearnings toward what we wish we were and hope we may be: wise, just, compassionate, and noble” (Steinbeck); we can choose the life we want to live.

Purpose:

The purpose of this unit is for students to gain a deeper understanding of American ideals, H.D. Thoreau, and the concept of desperate vs deliberate lives. To clarify this concept, the unit will focus on Laura D. Walls’ multiple lenses for the idea of living *deliberate*:

- Liberty: to live with freedom from inessentials
- Libre: books, read the world, read your life; “We are all schoolmasters, and our school-house is the universe” (“Huckleberries”)
- Libra: blind and holds scales to weigh right and wrong

Guiding questions:

- What does it mean to “live deliberately”?
- How and why have Americans been unable to escape the paradox of life in America?
- What are the consequences of not “living deliberately”?
- What evidence do we have in literature that it is possible to live deliberately?
- How can we, as individuals, be deliberate in our own lives? How can we demonstrate that choice to ourselves and others?

Timeline:

This unit will not be taught as a stand-alone unit. Rather, these lessons and the guiding questions, will be woven throughout the year and be looped back to as students read a variety of texts.

Lesson Plans: *This is a sampling of lessons associated with this unit*

- Understanding the context for Thoreau’s conceptualization of “living deliberately”
 - Lesson 1: Thoreau in his own words.

This activity is designed to provide students with an understanding of Thoreau’s beliefs and values. Students will make inferences about him through a series of quotations taken from a variety of his writings. After students have completed to this assignment, teacher will provide biographical readings and a lecture on Concord and H.D.Thoreau.
 - Lesson 2: A close reading of selections from *Walden*.

Students will read relevant selections of the text and answer questions designed to help students understand Thoreau’s experiences, beliefs and writing strategies.

- Living Free from Inessentials
 - Lesson 3: A consequence of not Living Deliberately: Willy Lowman’s desperation.

One reading of the term “*deliberate*” is Thoreau’s belief that we should live free from the inessentials of life. Arthur Miller explores the challenges of living deliberately in this manner in *Death of a Salesman*. While the Lowman’s have very little, they still struggle with the materialism of modern American and the American Dream. This lesson is designed to help students more clearly understand Thoreau’s ideas through reading his text and applying the concepts to the Lowmans’ life and to their own lives.

- Reading the World:
 - Lesson 4: Examining the power of *place* Another reading of the term “*deliberate*” is drawn from Thoreau’s urging his readers to “read the world,” not just books. Students will be asked to “read the world” of two different texts and apply the same idea to their own lives. The lesson focuses on the question “How does place impact who we are and how we see the world?”. After revisiting “Where I lived and what I lived for,” students will explore Cristina Henriquez’s *The Book of Unknown Americans*. Students conduct close reading of setting and description in the novel and then complete a writing about their own place. What does their place say about them? How does place impact how we see ourselves or how others see us?

***“Paradox and Dream” reading included for context

Who was H.D. Thoreau?

While we can read about a person to understand him (and there are some great biographies of Thoreau!) the truest way to understand someone is hearing what they have to say in their own voice. Fortunately, Thoreau said A LOT. In fact, in addition to *Walden*, he wrote many shorter works, journals that amounted to more than 2 million words, and letters to friends and family. Below is a series of quotations, listed in chronological order, taken from a variety of Thoreau's writings. Using his own words, who do you think he was? What were some of the experiences he had? What did he believe?

Assignment: In your groups, complete the chart for your assigned section. Be prepared to share your ideas with the class.

Quotations	Inferences: What does the quote say about Thoreau? What did he value? What did he believe?
<p>If I am not I, who will be? –<i>Journal</i>, 9 August 1841</p> <p>Go toward the sun and your shadow will fall behind you. –<i>Journal</i>, 8 February 1841</p> <p>Till we have loved we have not imagined the heights of love. –<i>Journal</i>, 28 September 1843</p> <p>I live in the present. I only remember the past, and anticipate the future. –Thoreau to H. G. O. Blake, 27 March 1848</p> <p>Knowledge can be acquired only by a corresponding experience. How can we know what we are told merely? Each man can interpret another's experience only by his own. –<i>A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers</i>, 1849</p> <p>I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. –"Civil Disobedience", 1849</p> <p>Even the death of Friends will inspire us as much as their lives. They will leave consolation to the mourners, as the rich leave money to defray the expenses of their funerals, and their memories will be incrustated over with sublime and pleasing thoughts, as monuments of other men are</p>	

overgrown with moss; for our Friends have no place in the graveyard.

—*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*,
1849

One moment of serene and confident life is more glorious than a whole campaign of daring. We should be ready for all issues, not daring to die but daring to live.

—*Journal*, June 1850

Men die of fright and live of confidence.

—*Journal*, 1850

I love nature, I love the landscape, because it is so sincere. It never cheats me. It never jests. It is cheerfully, musically earnest.

—*Journal*, 16 November 1850

Let me say to you and to myself in one breath: Cultivate the tree which you have found to bear fruit in your soil. Regard not your past failures nor successes. All the past is equally a failure and a success; it is success in as much as it offers you the present opportunity.

—*Journal*, 1850

Do we call this the land of the free? What is it to be free from King George the Fourth and continue the slaves of prejudice? What is it to be born free and equal, and not to live? What is the value of any political freedom, but as a means to moral freedom?

—*Journal*, 16 February 1851

My greatest skill has been to want but little.

—*Journal*, 19 July 1851

The question is not what you look at, but what you see.

—*Journal*, 5 August 1851

It takes a man of genius to travel in his own country, in his native village; to make any progress between his door and his gate.

—*Journal*, 6 August 1851

Whatever has not come under the sway of man is wild. In this sense original and independent men are wild – not tamed and broken by society.

–*Journal*, 3 September 1851

Simplicity is the law of nature for men as well as for flowers.

–*Journal*, 29 February 1852

Whatever your sex or position, life is a battle in which you are to show your pluck, and woe be to the coward.

–*Journal*, 21 March 1853

We can possibly get along with a neighbor, even with a bedfellow, whom we respect but very little; but as soon as it comes to this, that we do not respect ourselves, then we do not get along at all.

–Letter to H. G. O. Blake, 10 April 1853

We have used up all our inherited freedom, like the young bird the albumen in the egg. It is not an era of repose. If we would save our lives, we must fight for them.

–*Journal*, 16 June 1854

The universe is wider than our views of it.

–*Walden*, 1854

Things do not change; we change.

–*Walden*, 1854

Say what you have to say, not what you ought. Any truth is better than make-believe.

–*Walden*, 1854

Ah! I need solitude. I have come forth to this hill at sunset to see the forms of the mountains in the horizon – to behold and commune with something grander than man. Their mere distance and unprofanedness is an infinite encouragement. It is with infinite yearning and aspiration that I seek solitude, more and more resolved and strong; but with a certain weakness that I seek society ever.

–*Journal*, 14 August 1854

Pursue some path, however narrow and crooked,
in which you can walk with love and reverence.
Wherever a man separates from the multitude and
goes his own way, there is a fork in the road,
though the travelers along the highway see only
a gap in the paling.

–*Journal*, 18 October 1855

That man is the richest whose pleasures are the
cheapest.

–*Journal*, 11 March 1856

A man cannot be said to succeed in this life who
does not satisfy one friend.

–*Journal*, 19 February 1857

If a man is rich and strong anywhere, it must be
on his native soil. Here I have been these forty
years learning the language of these fields that I
may the better express myself. If I should travel to
the prairies, I should much less understand them,
and my past life would serve me but ill to describe
them. Many a weed here stands for more of life to
me than the big trees of California would if I
should go there. We need only travel enough to
give our intellects an airing.

–*Journal*, 20 November 1857

The value of any experience is measured, of
course, not by the amount of money, but the
amount of development we get out of it.

–*Journal*, 26 November 1860

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute
Freedom and Wildness, as contrasted with a
Freedom and Culture merely civil, – to regard
man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of
Nature, rather than a member of society.

–“Walking”, 1861

Talk of mysteries! – Think of our life in nature, –
daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with
it, – rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid
earth! the actual world! the common sense!
Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?

–*The Maine Woods*, 1864

Selections from *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, 1854

(from) "Economy"

WHEN I WROTE the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again.

I should not obtrude my affairs so much on the notice of my readers if very particular inquiries had not been made by my townsmen concerning my mode of life, which some would call impertinent, though they do not appear to me at all impertinent, but, considering the circumstances, very natural and pertinent.... I will therefore ask those of my readers who feel no particular interest in me to pardon me if I undertake to answer some of these questions in this book. In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well....

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been

If, according to biographical information, Thoreau socialized throughout his stay at the pond, what do you think he means by "...I am a sojourner in civilized life again"?

What narrative strategies, particularly with regard to voice and tone, is Thoreau employing in this work of creative non-fiction?

Why does Thoreau believe that inheriting a farm has a negative impact on a man's life?

born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? They have got to live a man's life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well-nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and woodlot! The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh.

But men labor under a mistake. The better part of the man is soon plowed into the soil for compost. By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal. It is a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before....

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed

How does Thoreau feel about the lives of “the mass of men”? What words, specifically, does he use to convey that belief?

even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things....

(from) "Where I Lived and What I lived For"

When first I took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there, which, by accident, was on Independence day, or the fourth of July, 1845, my house was not finished for winter, but was merely a defense against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough weather-stained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night. The upright white hewn studs and freshly planed door and window casings gave it a clean and airy look, especially in the morning when its timbers were saturated with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude from them....

I was seated by the shore of a small pond, about a mile and a half south of the village of Concord and somewhat higher than it, in the midst of an extensive wood between that town and known to fame, Concord Battle Ground; but I was so low in the woods that the opposite shore, half a mile off, like the rest, covered with wood, was my most distant horizon. For the first week, whenever I looked out on the pond it impressed me like a tarn

Describe Thoreau's new "abode"? How does he feel about it? What words, specifically, does he use to convey that feeling?

high up on the side of a mountain, its bottom far above the surface of other lakes, and, as the sun arose, I saw it throwing off its nightly clothing of mist, and here and there by degrees, while the mists, like ghosts, were stealthily withdrawing in every direction into the woods, as at the breaking up of some **nocturnal conventicler**. The very dew seemed to hang upon the trees later into the day than usual, as on the sides of mountains....

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was no life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have *somewhat hastily* concluded that is the chief end of man here to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

What is the effect of the simile he uses to describe the mist?

Define: nocturnal conventicler:

In your own words, explain why he went to the woods.

Explain the phrase “I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.”

Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumbnail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, be dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion....

Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry. Men say that a stitch in time saves nine, and so they take a thousand stitches today to save nine tomorrow. As for *work*, we haven't any of any consequence....

What are some of Thoreau's criticism of modern life? What alternatives to this modern life does he offer?

What does he mean by, "We are determined to be starved before we are hungry"?

For my part, I could easily do without the post-office. I think that there are very few important communications made through it. To speak critically, I never received more than one or two letters in my life – I wrote this some years ago – that were worth the postage. The penny-post is, commonly, an institution through which you seriously offer a man that penny for his thoughts which is so often safely offered in jest. And I am sure that I never read any memorable news in a newspaper. If we read of one man robbed, or murdered, or killed by accident, or on house burned, or one vessel wrecked, or one steamboat blown up, or one cow run over on the Western Railroad, or one mad dog killed, or one lot of grasshoppers in the winter, -- we never need read of another. One is enough....

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.

From "The Pond in Winter"

Every winter the liquid and trembling surface of the pond, which was so sensitive to every breath, and reflected every light and shadow, becomes solid to the depth of a foot or a foot and a half, so that it will support the heaviest teams, and perchance the snow covers it to an equal depth,

What is Thoreau's criticism of the post-office and the newspaper?

Interpret his metaphor for time. How does he feel about time?.

How does Thoreau characterize Walden Pond in winter? How does he employ personification to enhance that characterization?

and it is not to be distinguished from any level field. Like the marmots in the surrounding hills, it closes its eye-lids and becomes dormant for three months or more. Standing on the snow-covered plain, as if in a pasture amid the hills, I cut my way first through a foot of snow, and then a foot of ice, and open a window under my feet, where, kneeling to drink, I look down into the quiet parlor of the fished, pervaded by a softened light as through a window of ground glass, with its bright sanded floor the same as in summer; there a perennial waveless serenity reigns as in the amber twilight sky, corresponding to the cool and even temperament of the inhabitants. Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads....

From "Spring"

One attraction in coming to the woods to live was that I should have leisure and opportunity so see the spring come in. The ice in the pond at length begins to be honey-combed, and I can set my heel in it as I walk. Fogs and rains and warmer suns are gradually melting the snow; the days have grown sensibly longer; and I see how I shall get through the winter without adding to my woodpile, for large fires are no longer necessary. I am on the alert for the first signs of spring, to hear the chance note of some arriving bird, or the striped squirrel's chirp, for his stores must be now nearly exhausted, or see the woodchuck venture out of his winter

Why does he conclude that, "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads...."?

How does Thoreau describe the transition from winter to spring? In what ways is Walden alive again?

quarters....

The change from storm and winter to serene and mild weather, from dark and sluggish hours to bright and elastic ones, is a memorable crisis which all things proclaim. It is seemingly instantaneous at last. Suddenly an influx of light filled my house, though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with sleety rain. I looked out the window, and lo! where yesterday was cold gray ice there lay the transparent pond already calm and full of hope as in a summer evening, reflecting a summer evening sky in its bosom, though none was visible overhead, as if it had intelligence with some remote horizon....

From "Conclusion"

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn

How does this passage reflect Thoreau's reverence for nature?

Why did he leave his house at Walden Pond?

and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now. 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. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them....

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? 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.

Underline and explain two things he learned while living there:

What does he Thoreau believe about the idea of success?

What advice does he offer for living a good or fulfilling life?

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard times. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling glorious hours, even in a poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace. The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. May be they are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable. Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. ...Money is not required to buy one necessity of the soul....

The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

Why does he believe that, "The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any"?

What does he mean by "Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts"?

How is Thoreau using the word "awake"? What is its meaning in this context?

Living Free From Inessentials

Overview:

One reading of the term “deliberate” is Thoreau’s belief that we should live free (liberty) from the inessentials of life. Arthur Miller explores the challenges of living deliberately in this manner in *Death of a Salesman*. While the Lowman’s have very little, they still struggle with the materialism of modern American and the American Dream. This lesson is designed to help students more clearly understand Thoreau’s ideas through reading his text and applying the concepts to the Lowmans’ life and to their own lives.

Purpose:

Students will better understand Thoreau’s idea of living deliberately - free from the inessentials of life - its connection to the American dream, and its relevance today.

Activity

Divide students into partners or small groups.

Distribute handout including selections from “Economy” and *Death of a Salesman*.

Have students work together to read and answer the questions that follow. (During this time, the teacher should be circulating and answering questions for students. For example, clarify for students that “hair” refers to horse hair that was mixed into the plaster for insulation and strength. Or, inform students that Thoreau himself helped to forge the latch for his house. By engaging one on one with students, the teacher can best gauge comprehension and engagement and redirect students when necessary.)

Formative Assessment

As a class discuss students’ responses and answer any lingering questions.

What further conclusions did they draw about Thoreau?

What did he value?

What about the Lowmans?

Summative Assessment

To help students see the impact of spending in their own lives they will take an accounting of their own. Are they “living deliberately”? Are they “free from inessentials”? Written answers will be submitted.

Closely read Thoreau's accounting for the costs of his house at Walden Pond taken from "Economy":

I have thus a tight shingled and plastered house, ten feet wide by fifteen long, and eight-feet posts, with a garret and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap-doors, one door at the end, and a brick fireplace opposite . The exact cost of my house, paying the usual price for such materials as I used, but not counting the work, all of which was done by myself, was as follows ; and I give the details because very few are able to tell exactly what their houses cost, and fewer still, if any, the separate cost of the various materials which compose them :-

Boards,	\$8 02 ½	, mostly shanty boards.
Refuse shingles for roof and sides, . . . . .	.4 00	
Laths, . . . . .	.1 25	
Two second-hand windows with Glass, . . . . .	.2 43	
One thousand old brick, . . . . .	.4 00	
Two casks of lime, . . . . .	.2 40	That was high.
Hair, . . . . .	.0 31	More than I needed.
Mantle-tree iron, . . . . .	.0 15	
Nails, . . . . .	.3 90	
Hinges and screws, . . . . .	.0 14	
Latch,	0 10	
Chalk,	0 01	
Transportation, . . . . .	.1 40	I carried a good part on my back.
In all,	<hr/> \$28 12 ½	

1. What kind of house did he build?

2. What inferences can you make about Thoreau and his house?

Now, carefully read through his expenses as he details them:

By surveying, carpentry, and day-labor of various other kinds in the village in the meanwhile, for I have as many trades as fingers, I had earned \$13.34. The expense of food for eight months, namely, from July 4th to March 1st, the time when these estimates were made, though I lived there more than two years- not counting potatoes, a little green corn, and some peas, which I had raised, nor considering the value of what was on hand at the last date- was

Rice.....\$ 1.73 1/2
Molasses..... 1.73 (Cheapest form of the saccharine.)
Rye meal..... 1.04 3/4
Indian meal..... 0.99 3/4 (Cheaper than rye.)
Pork..... 0.22
(All Experiments Which Failed)
Flour..... 0.88 (Costs more than Indian meal, both money and trouble.)
Sugar..... 0.80
Lard..... 0.65
Apples..... 0.25
Dried apple..... 0.22
Sweet potatoes..... 0.10
One pumpkin..... 0.06
One watermelon..... 0.02
Salt..... 0.03

Yes, I did eat \$8.74, all told; but I should not thus unblushingly publish my guilt, if I did not know that most of my readers were equally guilty with myself, and that their deeds would look no better in print. The next year I sometimes caught a mess of fish for my dinner, and once I went so far as to slaughter a woodchuck which ravaged my bean-field- effect his transmigration, as a Tartar would say- and devour him, partly for experiment's sake; but though it afforded me a momentary enjoyment, notwithstanding a musky flavor, I saw that the longest use would not make that a good practice, however it might seem to have your woodchucks ready dressed by the village butcher.

Clothing and some incidental expenses within the same dates, though little can be inferred from this item, amounted to

\$ 8.40 3/4
Oil and some household utensils..... 2.00

So that all the pecuniary outgoes, excepting for washing and mending, which for the most part were done out of the house, and their bills have not yet been received- and these are all and more than all the ways by which money necessarily goes out in this part of the world- were

House.....\$ 28.12 1/2
 Farm one year..... 14.72 1/2
 Food eight months..... 8.74
 Clothing, etc., eight months..... 8.40 3/4
 Oil, etc., eight months..... 2.00
 ---- In all.....\$ 61.99 3/4

I address myself now to those of my readers who have a living to get. And to meet this I have for farm produce sold

\$ 23.44

Earned by day-labor..... 13.34

----- In all.....\$ 36.78

which subtracted from the sum of the outgoes leaves a balance of \$25.21 3/4 on the one side- this being very nearly the means with which I started, and the measure of expenses to be incurred- and on the other, beside the leisure and independence and health thus secured, a comfortable house for me as long as I choose to occupy it.

1. What observations can you make about his spending?

2. How does this accounting reflect his idea of "living deliberately"?

Now, reread the following scene from Act 1 of *Death of a Salesman*:

WILLY: What do we owe?

LINDA: Well, on the first there's sixteen dollars on the refrigerator

WILLY: Why sixteen?

LINDA: Well, the fan belt broke, so it was a dollar eighty.

WILLY: But it's brand new.

LINDA: Well, the man said that's the way it is. Till they work themselves in, y'know. (They move through the wall-line into the kitchen.)

WILLY: I hope we didn't get stuck on that machine.

LINDA: They got the biggest ads of any of them!

WILLY: I know, it's a fine machine. What else?

LINDA: Well, there's nine-sixty for the washing machine. And for the vacuum cleaner there's three and a half due on the fifteenth. Then the roof, you got twenty-one dollars remaining.

WILLY: It don't leak, does it?

LINDA: No, they did a wonderful job. Then you owe Frank for the carburetor.

WILLY: I'm not going to pay that man! That goddam Chevrolet, they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car!

LINDA: Well, you owe him three and a half. And odds and ends, comes to around a hundred and twenty dollars by the fifteenth.

WILLY: A hundred and twenty dollars! My God, if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do!

1. What observations can you make about the Lowmans' spending? Do that have any inessentials?

2. Imagine a conversation between Thoreau and Willy Lowman. What do you think Thoreau would say to Willy? What would Willy say?

Time: Write down what you did and the duration of the activity

<u>Duration</u>	<u>Activity</u>
12:00am	
1:00am	
2:00am	
3:00am	
4:00am	
5:00am	
6:00am	
7:00am	
8:00am	
9:00am	
10:00am	
11:00am	
12:00pm	
1:00pm	
2:00pm	
3:00pm	
4:00pm	
5:00pm	
6:00pm	
7:00pm	
8:00pm	
9:00pm	
10:00pm	
11:00pm	

What are you doing with your money?

1. What was your greatest financial expense yesterday? Is that a daily expense or uncommonly?
2. Are you surprised by how much or how little you spent?
3. Do you think that day is average in terms of your spending? Was it low or high?

What are you doing with your time?

1. What was the most time consuming activity for you yesterday? Is that part of your daily routine?
2. How would you have spent your time differently on a different day? (ie. a weekend vs. a weekday)
3. Were you surprised by the results of your accounting?

Are you living deliberately: free from inessentials of life?

Examining the Power of Place

Who we are and where we are are inextricably tied to one another. Often, the place we live or spend time is a direct reflection of who we are. Sometimes, though, our identity and the place we find ourselves are in such stark contrast that it creates a painful dissonance. Still other times, while there may be a contrast, a place changes who we are until we become part of that place. To understand the power of a place, we must consider two important questions:

1. How does one come to know a place?
2. How does knowing a place impact our understanding of another person or ourselves?

Step 1: Pre-writing Homework

In Classroom, answer each of the questions. (See Classroom for assignment). Be prepared to discuss your answers in class tomorrow.

1. What aspects of a place make it unique or significant?
2. As readers, how does an author's description of a place impact the way we understand that place? What stylistic choices might an author make to clearly convey the importance of a place?

Step 3: Defining the power of place

1. In Thoreau's chapter "Where I lived and what I lived for" he describes his house and the surrounding area at Walden Pond. As a group, reread that selection in your *Walden* packet and identify as many aspects of place as you can. Write the words from the text that convey place:

2. What does Thoreau's depiction of this place tell us about him? (facts and inference)

3. What mood is conveyed? (How does it make you feel?)

Step 3: Textual Analysis - Group Work

2. In Alma's first chapter, her family is in a new place for the first time. As a group, reread chapter 1. As you read, identify as many aspects of place as you can. Write the words from the text that convey place:

3. What does Henriquez's depiction of this place tell us about the characters? (facts and inference)

4. What mood is conveyed? (How does it make you feel?)

Examining the power of place: What does your place say about you?

As we saw in *Walden* and in Henriquez's depiction of the family's new home in chapter one of *The Book of Unknown Americans*, place can be a reflection of many aspects of a person's life; who we are and where we are are inextricably tied to one another. Now it is your turn to look closely at a place in your own life and reflect on what it says about you.

Prewriting

Choose a significant place in your life to carefully explore. State the place here: _____

Brainstorm a list of words you might use in your writing about that place: (Revisit your notes on what it means to know a place.)

Brainstorm a list of words you might use to convey the importance of that place. How will your reader better understand you as a result of reading about your place?

Writing

In **no less than 250 words**, write a well-developed description of your place. Remember that this description should convey, through diction, tone, and mood, the importance of this place. (It should help us understand who you are without you simply stating "This place is important because...")

Due Date:

Point Value:

“Paradox and Dream”

from *America and Americans* (1966)

by John Steinbeck

(1) One of the generalities most often noted about Americans is that we are a restless, a dissatisfied, a searching people. We bridle and buck under failure, and we go mad with dissatisfaction in the face of success. We spend our time searching for security, and hate it when we get it. For the most part we are an intemperate people: we eat too much when we can, drink too much, indulge our senses too much, Even in our so-called virtues we are intemperate: a teetotaler is not content not to drink--he must stop all the drinking in the world; a vegetarian among us would outlaw the eating of meat. We work too hard, and many die under the strain; and then to make up for that we play with a violence as suicidal.

(2) The result is that we seem to be in a state of turmoil all the time, both physically and mentally. We are able to believe that our government is weak, stupid, overbearing, dishonest, and inefficient, and at the same time we are deeply convinced that it is the best government in the world, and we would like to impose it upon everyone else. We speak of the *American Way of Life* as though it involved the ground rules for the governance of heaven. A man hungry and unemployed through his own stupidity and that of others, a man beaten by a brutal policeman, a woman forced into prostitution by her own laziness, high prices, availability, and despair--all bow with reverence toward the *American Way of Life*, although each one would look puzzled and angry if he were asked to define it. We scramble and scabble up the stony path toward the pot of gold we have taken to mean security. We trample friends, relatives, and strangers who get in the way of our achieving it, and once we get it we shower it on psychoanalysts to try to find out why we are unhappy, and finally, if we have enough of the gold we contribute it back to the nation in the form of foundations and charities.

(3) We fight our way in, and try to buy our way out. We are alert, curious, hopeful, and we take more drugs designed to make us unaware than any other people. We are self-reliant and at the same time completely dependent. We are aggressive, and defenseless. Americans overindulge their children; the children in turn are overly dependent on their parents. We are complacent in our possessions, in our houses, in our education; but it is hard to find a man or woman who does not want something better for the next generation. Americans are remarkably kind and hospitable and open with both guests and strangers; and yet they will make a wide circle around the man dying on the pavement. Fortunes are spent getting cats out of trees and dogs out of sewer pipes; but a girl screaming for help in the street

draws only slammed doors, closed windows, and silence.

(4) Now there is a set of generalities for you, each one of them canceled out by another generality. Americans seem to live and breathe and function by paradox; but in nothing are we so paradoxical as in our passionate belief in our own myths. We truly believe ourselves to be natural-born mechanics and do-it-yourselfers. We spend our lives in automobiles, yet most of us--a great many of us at least--do not know enough about a car to look in the gas tank when the engine fails. Our lives as we live them would not function without electricity, but it is a rare man or woman who, when the power goes off, knows how to look for a burned-out fuse and replace it. We believe implicitly that we are the heirs of the pioneers; that we have inherited self-sufficiency and the ability to take care of ourselves, particularly in relation to nature. There isn't a man among us in ten thousand who knows how to butcher a cow or a pig and cut it up for eating, let alone a wild animal. By natural endowment, we are great rifle shots and great hunters--but when hunting season opens there is a slaughter of farm animals and humans by men and women who couldn't hit a real target if they could see it. Americans treasure the knowledge that they live close to nature, but fewer and fewer farmers feed more and more people; and as soon as we can afford to we eat out of cans, buy microwave dinners, and haunt the delicatessens. Affluence means moving to the suburbs, but the American suburbanite sees, if anything, less of the country than the city apartment dweller with his window boxes and his African violets carefully tended under lights. In no country are more seeds and plants and equipment purchased, and less vegetables and flowers raised.

(5) The paradoxes are everywhere: We shout that we are a nation of laws, not men--and then proceed to break every law we can if we can get away with it. We proudly insist that we base our political positions on the issues--and we will vote against a man because of his religion, his name, or the shape of his nose.

(6) We believe in the manliness of our men and the womanliness of our women, but we go to extremes of expense and discomfort to cover any natural evidence that we are either.

(7) We fancy ourselves as hardheaded realists, but we will buy anything we see advertised, particularly on television; and we buy it not with reference to the quality or the value of the product, but directly as a result of the number of times we have heard it mentioned. The most arrant nonsense about a product is never questioned. We are afraid to be awake, afraid to be alone, afraid to be a moment without the noise and confusion we call entertainment. We boast of our dislike of highbrow art and music, and we

have more and better attended symphonies, art galleries, and theaters than any country in the world. We detest abstract art and produce more of it than all the rest of the world put together.

(8) One of the characteristics most puzzling to a foreign observer is the strong and imperishable dream the American carries. On inspection, it is found that the dream has little to do with reality in American life. Consider the dream of and the hunger for home. The very word can reduce nearly all of my compatriots to tears. Builders and developers never build houses--they build homes. The dream home is either in a small town or in a suburban area where grass and trees simulate the country. This dream home is a permanent seat, not rented but owned. It is a center where a man and his wife grow graciously old, warmed by the radiance of well-washed children and grandchildren. Many thousands of these homes are built every year; built, planted, advertised, and sold--and yet, the American family rarely stays in one place for more than five years. The home and its equipment are purchased on time and are heavily mortgaged. The earning power of the father is almost always over-extended. If the earner is successful and his income increases, right away the house is not big enough, or in the proper neighborhood. Or perhaps suburban life pales, and the family moves to the city, where excitement and convenience beckon.

(9) Some of these movements back and forth seem to me a result of just pure restlessness, pure nervousness. We do hear, of course, of people who keep the same job for twenty years, or thirty years, or forty years, and get a gold watch for it; but the numbers of these old and faithful employees are decreasing all the time. Part of the movement has to do with the nature of business itself. Work in factories in supermarkets, for contractors on the construction of houses, bridges, public buildings, or more factories is often temporary; the job gets done, or local taxes or wage increases or falling sales may cause a place of business to move to a new area. In addition, many of the great corporations have a policy of moving employees from one of their many branches to another. The employee with the home dream finds that with every removal he loses money. The sellers of homes make their profit on the down payment and on the interest on the loan; but the private owner who wants to turn over his dream home and move on to another finds that he always takes a loss. However, the dream does not die--it just takes another form.

(10) There is no question that American life is in the process of changing, but, as always in human history, it carries some of the past along with it. Automobile manufacturers discovered and developed the American yearning for status. By changing the appliances and gadgetry on each new model, they could make the car owner feel that his perfectly good automobile was old-fashioned and therefore undesirable. His children were afraid to be seen in it;

and, since a family's image of success in the world, or status, is to a certain extent dependent on the kind of a car the man drives, he was forced to buy a new one whether he needed it or not. The pattern has not changed: and none of this has in any way affected the American dream of home, which remains part Grandma Moses and part split-level ranch house in an area where to keep a cow or a pen of chickens is to break the law.

(11) Of course, the home dream can be acted out almost anywhere. Every summer morning about nine o'clock, on Third Street in New York, a stout and benign-looking lady came down the stairs from her flat to the pavement carrying the great outdoors in her arms. She set out a canvas deck chair, and over it mounted a beach umbrella of the kind which has a little cocktail table around it--and then, smiling happily, this benign and robust woman rolled out a little lawn made of green raffia in front of her chair, set out two pots of red geraniums and an artificial palm, brought a little cabinet with cold drinks-Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola-in a small icebox; she laid her folded copy of the Daily News on the table, arranged her equipment, and sank back into the chair--and she was in the country. She nodded and smiled to everyone who went by, and somehow she conveyed her dream to everyone who saw her, and everyone who saw her was delighted with her. For some reason I was overwhelmed with a desire to contribute to this sylvan retreat, and so one day when she had stepped inside for a moment, I deposited on her table a potted fern and a little bowl with two goldfish; and the next morning, I was pleased to see that these had been added to the permanent equipment. Every day through that summer the fern and the goldfish were part of the scene.

(12) The home dream is only one of the deepset American illusions which, since they can't be changed, function as cohesive principles to bind the nation together and make it different from all other nations. It occurs to me that all dreams, waking and sleeping, are powerful and prominent memories of something real, of something that really happened. I believe these memories--some of them, at least--can be inherited; our generalized dreams of water and warmth, of falling, of monsters, of danger and premonitions may have been pre-recorded on some kind of genetic tape in the species out of which we evolved or mutated, just as some of our organs which no longer function seem to be physical memories of other, earlier processes. The national dream of Americans is a whole pattern of thinking and feeling and may well be a historic memory surprisingly little distorted. Furthermore, the participators in the dream need not have descended physically from the people to whom the reality happened. This pattern of thought and conduct which is the national character is absorbed even by the children of immigrants born in America, but it never comes to the immigrants them-selves, no matter how they may wish it; birth on American soil seems to be required.

(13) I have spoken of the dream of home that persists in a time when home is neither required nor wanted. Until very recently home was a real word, and in the English tongue it is a magic word. At first the word "home" meant safety, then gradually comfort. In the immediate American past, the home meant just those two things; the log houses, even the sod houses, were havens of safety, of defense, warmth, food, and comfort. Outside were hostile

Indians and dangerous animals, crippling cold and starvation. Many houses, including the one where President Johnson was born, built only a few generations back, have thick walls and gunslits for defense, a great hearth for cooking and for heat, a cellar under the floor and an attic for the storage of food, and sometimes even an interior well in case of siege. A home was a place where women and children could be reasonably safe, a place to which a man could return with joy and slough off his weariness and his fears. This symbol of safety and comfort is so recent in our history that it is no wonder that to all of us it remains dear and desirable.

(14) It is an American dream that we are great hunters, trackers, woodsmen, deadshots with a rifle or a shotgun; and this dream is deeply held by Americans who have never fired a gun or hunted anything larger or more dangerous than a cockroach. But I wonder whether our deep connection with firearms is not indeed a national potential; not long ago we had to be good hunters or we starved, good shots or our lives were in danger. Can this have carried over? Early in World War II, I spent a good deal of time at the schools for aerial gunnery. The British, having been in the war for a long time, sent teams of instructors to teach our newly inducted men to handle the tail and ball-turret guns in our B-17 bombers, but the instruction began with small arms, since all shooting is pretty much the same. I remember an Englishman saying to me. "It is amazing how quickly these men learn. Some of them have never handled a weapon, and yet it seems to come to them as though they knew it; they pick it up much faster than the English lads do. 'Maybe they're just born with the knack.'"

(15) The inventiveness once necessary for survival may also be a part of the national dream. Who among us has not bought for a song an ancient junked car, and with parts from other junked cars put together something that would run? This is not lost; American kids are still doing it. The dreams of a people either create folk literature or find their way into it; and folk literature, again, is always based on something that happened. Our most persistent folk tales--constantly retold in books, movies, and television shows--concern cowboys, gunslinging sheriffs, and Indian fighters. These folk figures existed--perhaps not quite as they are re-called nor in the numbers indicated, but they did exist; and this dream also persists. Even businessmen in Texas wear the high-heeled boots and big hats, though they ride in air-conditioned Cadillacs and have forgotten the reason for the high heels. All our children play cowboy and Indian; the brave and honest sheriff who with courage and a six-gun brings law and order and civic virtue to a Western community is perhaps our most familiar hero, no doubt descended from the brave mailed knight of chivalry who battled and over-came evil with lance and sword. Even the recognition signals are the same: white hat, white armor--black hat, black shield. And in these moral tales, so deep set in us, virtue does not arise out of reason or orderly process of law--it is imposed and maintained by violence.

(16) I wonder whether this folk wisdom is the story of our capability. Are these stories permanent because we knew within ourselves that only the threat of violence makes it possible for us to live together in peace? I think that surviving folk tales are directly based on memory. There must have been a leader like King Arthur; although there is no historical record to prove it. The very strength of the story presumes his existence. We know there were

gunslinging sheriffs--not many, but some; but if they had not existed, our need for them would have created them. It interests me that the youthful gangs in our cities, engaging in their "rumbles" which are really wars, and doing so in direct and overt disobedience of law and of all the pressures the police can apply--that these gangs take noble names, and within their organizations are said to maintain a code of behavior and responsibility toward one another and an obedience to their leaders very like that of the tight-knit chivalric code of feudal Europe; the very activities and attitudes which raise the hand of the law against these gangs would, if the nation needed them, be the diagnostics of heroes. And indeed, they must be heroes to themselves.

(17) A national dream need not, indeed may not be clear-cut and exact. For Americans too the wide and general dream has a name. It is called "the American Way of Life." No one can define it or point to any one person or group who lives it, but it is very real nevertheless, perhaps more real than that equally remote dream the Russians call Communism. These dreams describe our vague yearnings toward what we wish were and hope we may be: wise, just, compassionate, and noble. The fact that we have this dream at all is perhaps an indication of its possibility.

“America and Americans”

Answer the following questions in response to your reading of “America and Americans: Paradox and Dream” by John Steinbeck.

1. According to Steinbeck, what are some of the ideals that Americans live by? (name at least 5)
2. In what ways do we undermine our own values?
3. What is Steinbeck’s ultimate message?
4. Do you agree with Steinbeck? Why/why not?
5. Select 3 key quotes from this reading that you believe are essential to understanding this argument.