

## **Using Thoreau's “Walking” to Strengthen Our Writing Two-Week Unit—7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades**

### **Overview**

In this unit, middle school students will observe with a purpose and write with an audience in mind. They will investigate how a place can have diversity of meaning and importance to different people. Students will analyze Thoreau's essay “Walking” and use The Old Forest, an urban wilderness, to strengthen these skills. Students will have the opportunity to self-select topics for developing background knowledge, to choose the purpose of the observations/data collection they will focus on while visiting The Old Forest, and to choose their audience and the type of writing in response to the time spent in the woods.

### **Understanding Goals**

#### **Students will:**

- research the life of Henry David Thoreau and his relationship with Walden Pond. They will research the history of The Old Forest, a 10,000-year-old urban forest in the middle of Memphis, Tennessee. They will research the many purposes people have for walking, specifically in nature.
- do a close read of Thoreau's essay, “Walking.” They will analyze the text to identify Thoreau's ideas on walking, observation, and purpose. They will investigate ways that following Thoreau's examples can strengthen their writing.
- walk and observe with a specific purpose in mind in The Old Forest. Students will create field journals that meet the needs of the writing tasks they have set for themselves.
- will use their field journals to create a final draft of a piece of writing that matches the purpose of their observations.

### **Standards—NCTE / IRA Standards for English Language Arts**

- Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

- Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

## Preparation

- Select excerpts from “Walking” and annotate for vocabulary, allusions, and events to give students the background knowledge to infer meaning.
- Select articles and websites for students to use for web quests and research.
- Create Resources Folder on computers for students that includes links to all web quests, websites, research material, and presentation software.
- Create rubrics (teacher and peer) for research groups and presentations.
- Create stations for Brainstorming Circle. Need markers and large chart paper to create one prompt for each station. Prompts for stations: 1) Brainstorm verbs for walking; 2) Brainstorm reasons people write; 3) Brainstorm how you make strong observations; 4) Brainstorm why people spend time outdoors; and 5) Brainstorm different types of jobs or tasks in a wilderness setting that require observation or data collecting skills.
- See-Think-Wonder--Select photographs of natural surroundings of The Old Forest, people making observations or collecting data in a wooded area, and a solitary figure walking in The Old Forest.
- Create introduction PowerPoint.
- Set up research stations on-line and in the classroom for groups to use.
- Create text-dependent questions for “Walking” close read.
- Create resource centers for observation days and writing days: include models of field journals, sketch books, scientific journals for data collection, and the types of writing that students have selected, graphic organizers for pre-writing, checklists for editing and peer editing, and a rubric for the final draft.

## Lessons and Activities

### Lesson One (1 day)

“Wildness is the preservation of the World.” HDT

**Brainstorming Circle**—Divide students into five groups and explain that each group is going to brainstorm at five different stations. Discuss the importance of “piggybacking” and commenting on other students' ideas, especially as they move into the second, third, and fourth rotation. Be prepared to push students to think outside of the box. Have ideas and questions to consider typed out for each station. If you see a group struggling, hand one of the students an idea or question to re-engage the thinking and conversation.

After brainstorming at the final station, give students a short time to evaluate the ideas that the class has generated. Then one by one, have the groups lead whole group discussions about their ideas.

**See-Think-Wonder Activity (Visible Thinking Strategy)**—Have students pair up and use their writing journals. Select several photos to project on the screen. For each photograph, have students write I see..., I think..., and I wonder.... Give students silent time to closely observe and write answers in journals. After viewing all photographs, have students do a Think-Pair-Share before opening discussion to whole group.

Wrap-up—Using their writing journals, have students reflect on the following questions: What connections do you see between walking and writing? What connections do you see between observing and writing? What connections do you see between nature, walking, observing, and writing? Encourage students to consider the charts and the discussions and to create venn diagrams if they are struggling to find similarities.

## **Lesson Two (3 days—possibly 4 depending on the number of groups to present) Background research and Student Teaching/Presentations**

“The walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise, as it is called, as the sick take medicine at stated hours ...but it is itself the enterprise and adventure of the day.”

HDT

In groups of two or three, have students share their answers and reflections from the wrap-up of lesson one. Then have each group write a prediction of what topic and skills they will be studying for the next couple of weeks. Have students share their ideas with the whole group as they hang their predictions on the board.

Teacher will introduce the unit as the students take notes and begin considering the choices that they will make during the study.

After introduction, students will divide into groups based on the background topic that they would like to research: Henry David Thoreau, Walden, The Old Forest, and walking in nature.

**3-2-1 Bridge (Visible Thinking Strategy)** Before students begin their research, have each one create an initial response to their topic in their writing journals. Students should write 3 words that quickly come to mind when thinking about the topic. They should write 2 questions that they have about the topic. Finally, have them create a metaphor or simile about the topic. Groups will use web quests, other internet resources, and print resources in class and at home to gather notes and create a PowerPoint or Prezi to teach the class about their topic.

During the presentations, students will take notes about the four topics and use teacher-made rubrics to give peer feedback to each presentation group.

**3-2-1 Bridge** After the presentations, have the students create a second 3-2-1. Then write a **bridge**. This is a statement that allows students to show how their new ideas connect to or changed during the course of their research and presentation.

### **Lesson Three (1.5 day) Close read of “Walking”**

“Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plain.” HDT

Students will read annotated excerpts from “Walking.” Then students will answer text-dependent questions based on their first, second, and third readings of the excerpts.

**The 4 C's (Visible Thinking Strategy)** In small groups, students identify connections between the text and their own lives and/or learning, parts of the text that they want to challenge, key concepts or ideas, and changes in attitudes suggest by the writing.

Depending on the weather, take students outside to read and discuss.

### **Lesson Four (1 day) Observing with a purpose and writing for an audience**

“The questions is not what you look at, but what you see.” HDT

Warm-up—During bellwork, have students look at three of the charts they created during the brainstorm circles on the first day: how you make strong observations, why people spend time outdoors, and different types of jobs in a wilderness setting that require observation skills.

Have students do a turn-and-talk review of note-taking (observing) with a purpose and writing with a specific audience in mind. Share whole group. Have students take out their 4 C's notes from "Walking." In the same small groups from that discussion, have students discuss Thoreau's observations and his intended audience.

Have resource centers set up with different types of field journals, notes, and data that people collect when walking in nature. In each of the centers, include models of the types of writing that writers would create from these observations. As students are rotating, be available to answer questions and offer guidance about the type of observations and writing that they will focus on while in The Old Forest.

In their writing journals, have students commit to the type of observations they will make in The Old Forest. Have them describe the type of writing they will create after the field trip. Have them reflect on why they are drawn to this type of observation and writing.

### **Lesson Five (1 day)**

"We should go forth on the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return; prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only, as relics to our desolate kingdoms. If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again; if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man; then you are ready for a walk." HDT

### **Observations in The Old Forest.**

Students will hike the Old Forest Loop with a map and guides. They will search for locations that they learned about during their research. They will also look for spots that they might want to use for their observations.

After hiking the loop, students will break into groups based on the purpose of their observations. One adult leader will accompany each group. Using information collected during the hike, students will select the location(s) where they will be observing. Give the leader the models and examples of the type of observations that their students are doing. Also, create a list of questions and/or prompts that will help guide students if they are having trouble getting started. Allow groups to decide how to structure their observation locations and times.

Once students return to school, have them reflect on their walk in the woods by writing a **I Used to Think..., Now I Think (Visible Thinking Strategy)** about The Old Forest and spending time in nature.

### **Lesson Six Writing (3 days—one for prewriting; two for peer editing, teacher conferences, and revisions)**

“Moreover, you must walk like a camel which is said to be the only beast which ruminates when walking. When a traveller asked Wordsworth’s servant to show him her master’s study, she answered 'Here is his library, but his study is out of doors.’” HDT

Students will begin class by sharing their field journals including observations, sketches, and data with their teammates who are focusing on the same type of writing. Then students will begin their individual writing projects. Resource centers with models should still be available. Set mini-lessons for students who need assistance with graphic organizers and pre-writing sheets. Have appointment sheets out for students to sign up for writing conferences with teacher.

### **Student Assessments**

Writing journals, background research and presentations, self reflection, peer reflections, use of visible thinking strategies, field journals, and final draft of writing in response to The Old Forest

### **Resources**

- “Walking” by Henry David Thoreau
- *Henry David Thoreau: An American Landscape* edited and illustrated by Robert L. Rothwell
- Non-fiction articles on the reasons people walk and work in nature
- Articles on The Old Forest
- Overton Park Conservancy website—[www.overtonpark.org](http://www.overtonpark.org)
- iNaturalist link on the OPC website
- Examples of different genres of writing that are based on the observations of the natural world: scientific articles—botany, insects, reptiles, mammals, climate conditions, etc.; environmental activism; memoirs; meditation and walking in nature; fiction—include excerpts of Peter Taylor's short story “The Old Forest”
- Video clips from *10 Parks That Changed America*
- Book: *Overton Park* by William Bearden
- Documentary: *Overton Park: A Century of Change* by William Bearden
- *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners* by Ritchhart, Church, and Morrison