

Arielle Trager

Living and Writing Deliberately: The Concord Landscapes and Legacy of Henry Thoreau

**Threads:**

Unit 1: Being Awake, Aware, and Alive

Unit 1: Living in Nature

Unit 2: Living in Society

Unit 2: Choosing Life with Principle

**Note on the Unit Plans:** My lesson plans include two units: one creative writing unit for use at the beginning of the year to get to know students, and one unit on Living with Principles to go along with *A Raisin in the Sun*.

## Unit One: Deliberately Defining Ourselves

(Using the threads “Being Awake, Aware, and Alive,” and “Living in Nature”)

### Essential Questions:

1. What makes us feel alive and energized? What makes our lives meaningful?
2. How can we deliberately notice and focus on the things around us right now when we are distracted by worrying about the past or future, or by things (luxuries) we want?
3. What role does nature play in our high tech 21st century lives?
4. How can nature help us reflect on our own lives?

### Lesson 1 (Awake, Aware, and Alive):

**Objective:** Students will close read an excerpt from Thoreau’s “Walking,” in order to develop a definition of being “awake and alive.”

#### Warm Up:

1. Give the definition of being “awake” and the definition of being “alive.”
2. Now act like a philosopher and write what you think it *really* means to be “awake” and “alive” in life.
3. Discuss. Make a chart on the board of things that make us feel metaphorically awake and alive, and things that make us feel metaphorically sleepy. (ex. things we are passionate about vs. routines we don’t care about)

**Explanation:** “We are going to spend some time thinking about who we are, what is meaningful to us, and what makes us feel alive. We are going to use Thoreau, who wrote a lot about how to live a life that is really awake and alive. When I say awake and alive, I also want us to think about this word “deliberate.” Ask students for definition. Explain that Thoreau wrote about living “deliberately” in the same way he wrote about being awake and alive.

Share quote: “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.” Break down the word “deliberately”--sounds like “liberty.” “Deliberate” as a verb means to think about things very carefully and weigh all of your options before making decisions or acting. When we live our lives with liberty and also meaning, we are “awake and alive”

**Application:** Close read a section of “Walking” in groups. (up to and including paragraph that starts with “my vicinity affords many good walks...” and ends “It will

never become quite familiar to you.”) Highlight quotes which show what Thoreau thinks about being “awake” and “alive.”

**Wrap Up:** Share and discuss a few highlighted quotes. Summarize Thoreau’s ideas. (Further reading could also be assigned for hw.)

## **Lesson 2 (Awake, Aware, and Alive):**

**Objective:** Students will evaluate the extent to which Thoreau’s philosophy in “Walking” applies to our modern lives.

**Warm Up:** Since the last time we met, what’s something that made you feel awake or alive?

**Explanation:** “We’re going to look at a few more of Thoreau’s quotes so we can define his thoughts on being awake and alive, and decide if we agree with him--or if it’s even possible to follow his ideas in our modern world.

**Application:** Post other quotes around the room (see Lesson 2--Quotes Sheet below). Ask students to (from their seats) choose at least 2 quotes to respond to in their notebooks. Students will write:

1. What do you think this quote means?
2. Do you agree? Does it apply to your life?

Discuss. Push students to think about what these quotes would really mean for them in their 21st century lives. Many students might like Thoreau’s ideas, but ask them if they would walk for 4 hours each day without their phones. How can we strike a modern balance?

As a class, summarize what Thoreau thought about being awake and alive, AND some of the challenges we face in the modern world if we want to follow some of his ideas.

**Wrap Up:** Exit Ticket: What’s one way you can be more awake or alive this week?

## **Lesson 3 (Living in Nature):**

**Objective:** Students will identify key aspects of Thoreau’s nature writing and interpret the connections he makes between nature and self.

**Warm Up:** Notice an object in this room and write a detailed description of it in a paragraph. Try to make it as detailed as possible! Discuss--Was it difficult to describe

something in that much detail? What did it feel like? Were you aware of other things around you as you were writing?

**Explanation:** Thoreau wrote like this all the time, because, as we've discussed, he wrote about being really aware and alive in the moment and focusing on things around him. Let's look at some examples of Thoreau writing like this and identify some of his writing techniques and the personal ideas he expresses in this kind of writing.

**Application:** Read and annotate: The last section of "Walking" (from "We had a remarkable sunset one day..." to the end) and other quotes (see Lesson 3--Quotes Sheet below)

Make a list of writing techniques (personification, color, sound, lists, metaphor, etc.) and the personal ideas (that we are never alone, that we are connected to nature, that we should not be afraid of traveling to new places, etc.) Thoreau expresses in his writing. Does he only describe nature? (Push students to see how Thoreau ends up writing about himself and his own beliefs, how he also writes about nature to reflect on himself) How is it different from other genres?

**Wrap Up:** Exit Ticket: What's one way Thoreau uses nature to reflect on himself or express one of his beliefs?

#### **Lesson 4 (Living in Nature):**

**Objective:** Students will apply key aspects of Thoreau's nature writing to their own nature writing experiment.

**Explanation:** (Students should be informed of this activity at least a day before.) Today the class will go on a nature walk to a nearby green space. Students will bring their notebooks and remain silent for the whole walk. After walking quietly for a few minutes, students will have 10 minutes to write about their surroundings. The class will return leaving enough time to discuss the walk.

**Application:** Nature Walk

**Wrap Up:** Discuss what it felt like to be quiet for a long period of time and to write something so detailed. Did you only write about nature, or like in Thoreau's writing, did yourself and your ideas pop up? Was it easy or hard to concentrate? Did you write something you liked or not?

[Lesson 2 Quotes]

**Thoreau: Awake, Aware, and Alive**

1. “Above all, we cannot afford not to live in the present.” (“Walking”)
2. “The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake.... We must learn to reawaken and to keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn...” (Walden, Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”)
3. Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious care and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them...He has no time to be anything but a machine (Walden, Economy)
4. Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer? (Walden, Sounds)
5. The universe is wider than our views of it. (Walden, Conclusion)
6. Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. (Walking)

**Thoreau: Living in Nature**

1. We had a remarkable sunset one day last November. I was walking in a meadow the source of a small brook, when the sun at last, just before setting, after a cold grey day, reached a clear stratum in the horizon, and the softest brightest morning sun-light fell on the dry grass and on the stems of the trees in the opposite horizon, and on the leaves of the shrub-oaks on the hill-side, while our shadows stretched long over the meadow eastward, as if we were the only motes in its beams. It was such a light as we could not have imagined a moment before, and the air also was so warm and serene that nothing was wanting to make a paradise of that meadow. When we reflected that this was not a solitary phenomenon, never to happen again, but that it would happen forever and ever an infinite number of evenings, and cheer and reassure the latest child that walked there, it was more glorious still.

The sun sets on some retired meadow, where no house is visible, with all the glory and splendor that it lavishes on cities, and perchance, as it has never set before, — where there is but a solitary marsh hawk to have his wings gilded by it, or only a musquash looks out from his cabin, and there is some little black-veined brook in the midst of the marsh, just beginning to meander, winding slowly round a decaying stump. We walked in so pure and bright a light, gilding the withered grass and leaves, so softly and serenely bright — I thought I had never bathed in such a golden flood, without a ripple or a murmur to it. The west side of every wood and rising ground gleamed like the boundary of elysium, and the sun on our backs seemed like a gentle herdsman, driving us home at evening.

So we saunter toward the Holy Land; till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light, so warm and serene and golden as on a bank-side in Autumn.

2. While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me. The gentle rain which waters my beans and keeps me in the house today is not drear and melancholy, but good for me too....In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware the the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again. (Walden, Solitude)
  
3. "...not till we are completely lost, or turned round,--for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost,--do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature. Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations. (Walden, The Village)
  
4. I am no more lonely than a single mullein or dandelion in a pasture, or a bean leaf, or sorrel, or a horse-fly, or a humble-bee. I am no more lonely than the Mill Brook, or a weathercock, or the north star, or the south wind, or an April shower, or a January thaw, or the first spider in a new house. (Walden, Solitude)
  
5. "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads." (Walden, "The Pond in Winter")

**Unit 2: Living in Society with Principle**  
**(Using the Threads “Living in Society” and “Choosing Life with Principle”)**

**Essential Questions:**

1. How does society affect people, and how do people affect society?
2. How do young people contribute to or change their societies?
3. What are my principles and how do they direct my future?
4. How do my choices affect others in my society, and the future?

**Lesson 1 (Living in Society):**

**Objective:** Students will examine the ways social issues can affect individuals using *A Raisin in the Sun* and an excerpt from “Civil Disobedience”.

**Warm Up:** What does it mean to live in a “society”? What are the benefits and the dangers of living in society?

**Explanation:** [This lesson would occur after students have finished reading *A Raisin in the Sun*.] Today we are going to be focusing on how society can pressure people into things. We are going to be looking at all the different social issues the Younger family faced in *A Raisin in the Sun*, and start thinking about how other people and other books have addressed these same issues, and how you can too. You will start by filling out this chart with what you know about the Younger family. (see “Facing Social Pressures: *A Raisin in the Sun* and Thoreau” below) Walk through one example together.

**Application:** Students complete the first part of the chart explaining how each character in the Younger family faces different social pressures (race, class, age, gender...) and fights them in different ways (ex. Mama works tirelessly so her children can have a better life, Beneatha aspires to be a doctor and break out of traditional female roles in her relationships...) Discuss.

**Wrap Up:** Key Question: How do you see these same social issues affecting people today? How do people overcome them today?

**Homework:** Read the excerpt from “Civil Disobedience” and complete the chart for homework. (Excerpt from “But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men...” to “But it is easier to deal with the real possessor of a thing than with the temporary guardian of it.”) [A longer excerpt may be assigned!]

## **Lesson 2 (Living in Society):**

**Objective:** Students will examine the many ways in which individuals try to change their societies, using Thoreau and modern examples.

**Warm Up:** Look back over your homework and the excerpt from “Civil Disobedience.” Does Thoreau give any ideas about how to solve these social issues? Do you have any ideas? Discuss.

**Explanation:** We’ve discussed how society can affect individual people, and pressure them into certain things. Now we’re going to think about the ways that individuals can affect society through three examples--The Younger Family, Thoreau, and modern teenagers who have made a difference.

**Application:** Discuss the Youngers: Recall the chart that describes how they each pushed back against social pressures. We know it made a difference individually for them, but if we imagine they were a real family, would their actions have affected anyone else?

Watch: Two Videos on Thoreau and Civil Disobedience:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gugnXTN6-D4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elrTpoY6AYQ>

Discuss: What are examples of “civil disobedience” shown in these videos? (Note Thoreau’s involvement in the Underground Railroad, not discussed in videos.) How much of a difference do you think they made?

Read article on teens making a difference:

<http://metro.co.uk/2015/11/20/six-people-under-20-whove-already-helped-change-the-world-5510687/>

Discuss: How did these teens make a difference? Could you imagine you or any of your friends doing anything like this? Are there any local examples of teenagers you know pushing for changing in their communities or schools?

**Wrap up:** Does society control individuals, or do individuals control society? How?

## **Lesson 3 (Choosing Life with Principle):**

**Objective:** Students will define what it means to have principles, identify the principles of the Younger family, and Thoreau, and create a list of their own.

**Warm Up:** Define “principles.” Do you have any family or personal mottos that you live by?

**Explanation:** Discuss examples of principles. Use student examples, common examples (such as [these](#)), or possibly the principles/mottos of your school. Write a list together of what the Younger’s principles might be.

**Application:** Use the quote list to come up with three of Thoreau’s principles (see “Living with Principles--Thoreau” below). Discuss.

Begin writing a list of 5-10 of your own. Finish for homework.

**Wrap up:** Share a few personal principles so far.

#### **Lesson 4 (Choosing Life with Principle):**

**Objective:** Students will identify successful aspects of creative nonfiction essays, and begin to write a creative piece that demonstrates their principles.

**Warm Up:** Choose one of your principles that you wrote down, and one social issue that you care about (we may or may not have discussed it in previous lessons). Share.

**Explanation:** We’re going to start thinking about how you can really live by these principles, and possibly use your principles to face social issues that you disagree with. You will be writing a creative essay that showcases your beliefs and how to plan to live your life in society according to those beliefs. We will look at a few examples of the kinds of essays you can write.

**Application:** Choose 3 of the 5 “This I Believe” essays to read. (See “This I Believe Packet” below. Many more essays can be found on [npr.org](http://npr.org) or [thisibelieve.org](http://thisibelieve.org)) What do you like about each piece? What don’t you like about each?

Discuss. Make a list of writing techniques we like on the board.

**Wrap up:** Exit ticket: What principle/social issue would you like to write about? (Tell me if you are not sure!)

**Further Lessons:** Students will write their own “This I Believe” essays, using the work they’ve done to study their own principles and social issues they care about.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Facing Social Issues: *A Raisin in the Sun* and Thoreau**

<b>Character</b>	<b>Social Issue(s)</b>	<b>How they fight/face it</b>
<b>Mama</b>		
<b>Walter</b>		
<b>Ruth</b>		
<b>Beneatha</b>		

**Facing Social Issues: *A Raisin in the Sun* and Thoreau (cont'd)**

<b>Social Issue (What is a problem Thoreau sees in his society?)</b>	<b>Quote Evidence</b>

## Living With Principles - Thoreau

1. I have always endeavored to acquire strict business habits; they are indispensable to every man. (Walden, Economy)
2. Shall we always study to obtain more of these things (luxuries) and not sometimes to be content with less? (Walden, Economy)
3. There is some of the same fitness in a man's building his own house that there is in a bird's building its own nest. Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed, as birds universally sing when they are so engaged? (Walden, Economy)
4. How could youths better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of living? (Walden, Economy)
5. "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. (Walden, Where I Lived and What I Lived For)
6. If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. (Walden, Conclusion)
7. "I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government (Civil Disobedience)
8. Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison (Civil Disobedience)
9. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not a be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. (Civil Disobedience)
10. You must live within yourself, and depend upon yourself always tucked up and ready for a start, and not have many affairs. (Civil Disobedience)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## “This I Believe” Essay Packet

### Being Content With Myself by Kamaal Majeed

Why don't you 'act black'?"

Since my middle school years, I've been asked this question more than any other. It seems to me that too many people have let society program into their brains what should be expected of me, a black person, before ever interacting with me. But I believe in being who I am, not who others want me to be.

On my first day of high school, going into math class, two of my classmates pointed and laughed at me. I initially thought my fly was open, or that something was stuck in my teeth. But as I took my seat, I heard one of the students whisper, "Why is a black person taking Honors?" So my fly wasn't open. An honors level class had simply been joined by a student whose skin was an unsettling shade of brown.

Many people think my clothes should be big enough for me to live in, or expect me to listen exclusively to "black music." In seventh grade, a group of my peers fixed their cold stares on my outfit: cargo shorts and a plain, fitting t-shirt. They called out to me, "Go get some 'gangsta' clothes, white boy."

In one of my Spanish classes, as part of a review exercise, the teacher asked me, "¿Te gusta más la música de rap o rock?" "Do you like rap music or rock music more?" I replied, "La música de rock." The look of shock on my classmates' faces made me feel profoundly alienated.

I am now in my junior year of high school. I still take all Honors courses. My wardrobe still consists solely of clothes that are appropriate to my proportions. My music library spans from rock to pop to techno, and almost everything in between. When it comes to choosing my friends, I am still colorblind. I continue to do my best work in school in order to reach my goals; and yet, when I look in the mirror, I still see skin of that same shade of brown.

My skin color has done nothing to change my personality, and my personality has done nothing to change my skin color.

I believe in being myself. I believe that I—not any stereotype—should define who I am and what actions I take in life. In high school, popularity often depends on your willingness to follow trends. And I've been told that it doesn't get much easier going into adulthood. But the only other option is to sacrifice my individuality for the satisfaction and approval of others. Sure, this can be appealing, since choosing to keep my self-respect intact has made me unpopular and disliked at times, with no end to that in sight. Others' being content with me, though, is not nearly as important as my being content with myself.

*Kamaal Majeed is a high school student in Waltham, Mass. In addition to his studies, he works part-time at the local public library, and enjoys studying foreign languages and writing a personal journal. Majeed hopes to pursue a career in journalism. Independently produced for NPR by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman with John Gregory and Viki Merrick.*

## **America's Beauty is in its Diversity by ALAA EL-SAAD**

America is built on the idea of freedom, and there is no exception for Muslim women. I believe in the freedom of religion and speech. But mostly, I believe it's OK to be different, and to stand up for who and what you are. So I believe in wearing the *hijab*.

The *hijab* is a religious head covering, like a scarf. I am Muslim, and keeping my head covered is a sign of maturity and respect toward my religion and to Allah's will. To be honest, I also like to wear it to be different. I don't usually like to do what everyone else is doing. I want to be an individual, not just part of the crowd. But when I first wore it, I was also afraid of the reaction that I'd get at school.

I decided on my own that sixth grade was the time I should start wearing the *hijab*. I was scared about what the kids would say or even do to me. I thought they might make fun of me, or even be scared of me and pull off my headscarf. Kids at that age usually like to be all the same, and there's little or no acceptance of differences.

On the first day of school, I put all those negative thoughts behind my back and walked in with my head held high. I was holding my breath a little, but inside I was also proud to be a Muslim, proud to be wearing the *hijab*, proud to be different.

I was wrong about everything I thought the kids would say or even do to me. I actually met a lot of people because of wearing my head covering. Most of the kids would come and ask me questions — respectfully — about the *hijab* and why I wore it.

I did hear some kid was making fun of me, but there was one girl — she wasn't even in my class, we never really talked much — and she stood up for me, and I wasn't even there! I made a lot of new friends that year, friends that I still have until this very day, five years later.

Yes, I'm different, but everyone is different here, in one way or another. This is the beauty of America.

I believe in what America is built on: all different religions, races and beliefs. Different everything.

*>Independently produced for Tell Me More by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman with John Gregory and Viki Merrick.*

## **Always Go to the Funeral By DEIRDRE SULLIVAN**

I believe in always going to the funeral. My father taught me that.

The first time he said it directly to me, I was 16 and trying to get out of going to calling hours for Miss Emerson, my old fifth grade math teacher. I did not want to go. My father was unequivocal. "Dee," he said, "you're going. Always go to the funeral. Do it for the family."

So my dad waited outside while I went in. It was worse than I thought it would be: I was the only kid there. When the condolence line deposited me in front of Miss Emerson's shell-shocked parents, I stammered out, "Sorry about all this," and stalked away. But, for that deeply weird expression of sympathy delivered 20 years ago, Miss Emerson's mother still remembers my name and always says hello with tearing eyes.

That was the first time I went un-chaperoned, but my parents had been taking us kids to funerals and calling hours as a matter of course for years. By the time I was 16, I had been to five or six funerals. I remember two things from the funeral circuit: bottomless dishes of free mints and my father saying on the ride home, "You can't come in without going out, kids. Always go to the funeral."

Sounds simple — when someone dies, get in your car and go to calling hours or the funeral. That, I can do. But I think a personal philosophy of going to funerals means more than that.

"Always go to the funeral" means that I have to do the right thing when I really, really don't feel like it. I have to remind myself of it when I could make some small gesture, but I don't really have to and I definitely don't want to. I'm talking about those things that represent only inconvenience to me, but the world to the other guy. You know, the painfully under-attended birthday party. The hospital visit during happy hour. The Shiva call for one of my ex's uncles. In my humdrum life, the daily battle hasn't been good versus evil. It's hardly so epic. Most days, my real battle is doing good versus doing nothing.

In going to funerals, I've come to believe that while I wait to make a grand heroic gesture, I should just stick to the small inconveniences that let me share in life's inevitable, occasional calamity.

On a cold April night three years ago, my father died a quiet death from cancer. His funeral was on a Wednesday, middle of the workweek. I had been numb for days when, for some reason, during the funeral, I turned and looked back at the folks in the church. The memory of it still takes my breath away. The most human, powerful and humbling thing I've ever seen was a church at 3:00 on a Wednesday full of inconvenienced people who believe in going to the funeral.

After listening to the results of this project for several weeks, I knew I could do three minutes, too. Certainly not on world peace or the search for meaning in an increasingly distracted world or anything as grave and serious as all that, but on a belief just as true.

## **There is No Such Thing as Too Much Barbecue by JASON SHEEHAN**

I believe in barbecue. As soul food and comfort food and health food, as a cuisine of both solace and celebration. When I'm feeling good, I want barbecue. And when I'm feeling bad, I just want barbecue more. I believe in barbecue in all its regional derivations, in its ethnic translations, in forms that range from white-tablecloth presentations of cunningly sauced costillas, to Chinese take-out spareribs that stain your fingers red, to the most authentic product of the tarpaper rib shacks of the Deep South. I believe that like sunshine and great sex, no day is bad that has barbecue in it.

I believe in the art of generations of pit men working in relative obscurity to keep alive the craft of slow smoking as it's been practiced for as long as there's been fire. A barbecue cook must have an intimate understanding of his work: the physics of fire and convection, the hard science of meat and heat and smoke — and then forget it all to achieve a sort of gut-level, Zen instinct for the process.

I believe that barbecue drives culture, not the other way around. Some of the first blows struck for equality and civil rights in the Deep South were made not in the courtrooms or schools or on buses, but in the barbecue shacks. There were dining rooms, backyards and roadhouse juke joints in the South that were integrated long before any other public places.

I believe that good barbecue requires no decor, and that the best barbecue exists despite its trappings. Paper plates are okay in a barbecue joint. And paper napkins. And plastic silverware. And I believe that any place with a menu longer than can fit on a single page — or better yet, just a chalkboard — is coming dangerously close to putting on airs.

I believe that good barbecue needs sides the way good blues need rhythm, and that there is only one rule: Serve whatever you like, but whatever you serve, make it fresh. Have someone's mama in the back doing the "taters" and hush puppies and sweet tea, because Mama will know what she's doing — or at least know better than some assembly-line worker bagging up powdered mashed potatoes by the ton.

I believe that proper barbecue ought to come in significant portions. Skinny people can eat barbecue, and do, but the kitchen should cook for a fat man who hasn't eaten since breakfast. My leftovers should last for days.

I believe that if you don't get sauce under your nails when you're eating, you're doing it wrong. I believe that if you don't ruin your shirt, you're not trying hard enough.

I believe — *I know* — there is no such thing as too much barbecue. Good, bad or in-between, old-fashioned pit-smoked or high-tech and modern; it doesn't matter. Existing without gimmickry, without the infernal swindles and capering of so much of contemporary cuisine, barbecue is truth; it is history and home, and the only thing I don't believe is that I'll ever get enough.

## **The Power of Story by Alling Long**

When my dog Gracie disappeared six years ago, I really learned what I believe. Gracie escaped from my boyfriend's backyard around 2:00 p.m. We scoured the neighborhood for hours but had no luck. She was gone. We put up fliers, and by dark, we returned home, exhausted.

On the second day, I called my vet, the SPCA, and the animal shelter. Nothing. I felt lost, defeated.

If I knew Gracie had been killed, I would have been heartbroken, but I could've moved on. If I knew she was caught somewhere, I would rescue her. If I knew she had found a better home, I would be sad yet relieved. But how do I deal with the unknown? Pray? Wait patiently? Search endlessly? Give up? I didn't know what to do, what to hope for.

The third day, while I was searching in the woods for Gracie with my friend Rhea, I confessed that losing Gracie was like losing faith in everything. Rhea smiled and said, "You know, maybe Gracie's on a great adventure." It seems strange, but I felt better then. Rhea's words reminded me what, as a writer, I definitely have faith in: the power of story.

As one writer said, all we have is stories. It's what holds our life together. We call some stories science, some stories myth, but imagine hearing for the first time that the world may be round or that solid matter is mostly hollow. Such stories only become real when we believe them. And some stories are never supported with scientific fact, but they still seem to hold true.

For instance, ten years earlier, I'd dreamed that I should get a dog, and by that evening, Gracie, a goofy-looking gray mutt, came into my life. When people on the street would ask what her breed was, I would say Muppet wolf terrier. It was a breed I made up because I believed Gracie was a breed of her own, a fluffy half dog, half wolf.

So why not imagine now, as Rhea suggested, that she was off on an adventure exploring her wolf side?

The fourth day started with me finding a nickel on the sidewalk. I'd always thought of finding money as a good omen. And I was convinced it meant Gracie would come home on the fifth day. I guess it was another story to hold on to.

On day five, I was at a friend's house when her phone rang. I knew instantly it was news about Gracie. And I was right. Someone had found her in a downtown alley and had taken her in. Still, when I finally saw her in my hallway, her head lying quietly on her fluffy front paws, I cried. "My wolf days are over," Gracie seemed to say. "I'm back to being a dog."

Or so is the story I choose to believe.