

Agatha Wozniak

## **Being awake, aware, and alive**

Intro Unit - Who Am I?

### **Objectives**

- Explain what it means to “be awake” and what parts of society might hinder this.
- Describe how a person can live deliberately.
- Explain how we can stop to notice the “right now”.
- Explain how family, society, and culture influence who you are.
- Explain what your community is and how it impacts who you are.
- Describe who you are to the best of your ability.

### **Essential Questions**

- Who are we and what do we want out of life?
- What influences determine who you are?
- What people and influences that cross your path do you notice? Why?
- What is your community?
- What does it mean to “be awake”? How does this relate to society? To nature?
- What elements of society make you feel sleepy? Awake?
- What distracts you from being awake?
- How can we stop to notice what’s around us right now?
- How can we “live deliberately”?

### **Materials Needed**

*Walden*, “Economy”

*Walden*, “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”

### **Lesson 1 - Who are you, influences, community**

- 1) Start by having students reflect on the question “Who are you” by asking them to think of and write down their earliest memory.
  - a) Have them consider their place in the world at that time -- who were they at that moment? Who was with them? What were they doing? Are those people still with them? Are they still doing the same thing?
  - b) Have students volunteer to share their memories and reflections on who they were then.
- 2) Then have the students draw who they believe they are now using any symbols or images they feel is appropriate. Have them write a reflection on why they believe these images represent them. Are most of the symbols material objects? Who or what has influenced them to become what they are today? Why do they feel they were influenced by this? Could they have resisted if they wanted to? Did they?

- a) Have students volunteer to share their drawings and reflections. Discuss how might their drawings of themselves change if they knew they had to share their image? Or if they knew it was 100% private? Why is this?
- 3) As a class, create a list of influences the students have on their lives. Ask students to consider what impact those people who they might encounter in their daily lives, but are “invisible” to them.
  - a) After, group them into categories, such as family, society, and culture. Are we all really just a collection of ideas and experiences? Can we really even define ourselves?
  - b) Have students reflect on the question “how can you discover who you really are?”. With a partner, have them brainstorm answers. Then, have the pairs also define who their community is.
  - c) Share answers as a class and create a definition for community -- each student may have a different response. How much are they reliant on their individual community?
- 4) Have each student draw their community -- people, places, etc -- and arranged them on a wall to create a collage.
- 5) Finish with the students writing a reflection on the collage -- how does their community fit into the larger class community? Where are there overlaps? How much does their community impact others in the classroom? Do they feel like they are an authority on their community?

## **Lesson 2 - Awake, Society, sleepiness vs. wakefulness**

- 1) “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, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor.” (*Walden*, “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”)
  - a) Ask students to explain what they believe it means to be “awake” - remind them to consider what influences they experience on a daily basis.
- 2) Now, ask them to explain what they believe it means to “live deliberately”?
  - a) Create a working definition for both using student responses being sure to emphasize the need to live in every moment, in the present moment, the right now.
- 3) To emphasize living in the present moment and being aware, have the students again take a few minutes to think about who they are by having them “account for their lives”. Use Thoreau’s accounting of his life in *Walden*, “Economy” as an example for the students. Using the day before, have each student create a list of everything they used or did the day before that required money. This can include a cell phone bill, lunch, gas for the car, shampoo, clothing, etc. Have the students tally up the total amount and reflect on the below questions in their notes. Share in class.

- a) Does the amount surprise you? Does everything you spent money on have value to you? Where did you choose to stop accounting for spending - ie: is saying you used \$.5 of shampoo going too far? Does it matter how much you spend?
- 6) Have students consider in pairs the Thoreau quotes: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (*Walden*) and "There is no more fatal blunderer than he who consumes the greater part of his life getting his living." ("Life Without Principle")
  - a) What do these mean?
  - b) How would these quotes relate to the previous activity?
  - c) Does everything we spend money on add value and awaken us or does it only serve to distract us from people, nature, the world?
- 7) Take the students outside for a walk to a quiet, forested area (or just a quiet place somewhere other than the classroom). Have them sit quietly and just listen for a minute or a two, then write down what they notice - see, hear, touch.
  - a) Have the students share what they observed, without the distractions of modernity.
  - b) Then, have them sit and reflect on their day. Where do you usually go when you have to reflect? What new thing did they notice? What was the effect?
- 8) Have the students consider what distracts them from being awake. Is it only items from the previous list or is there more than that? What role does society/family/culture/community have on either helping awaken or distract them?
- 9) Finally, have the students discuss in groups what they could do that would lessen the distractions. Have them consider the following quotes as part of their reflection process. Students could create short "how to" guides or a pamphlet on how to be more awake and alive on a daily basis.
  - a) "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*)
  - b) "A man sees only what concerns him. A botanist absorbed in the study of grasses does not distinguish the grandest pasture of oaks. He, as it were, tramples down oaks unwittingly in his walk or at most sees only their shadows." ("Autumnal Ties")