

Mr. McTigue and Ms. Sasso
AP English: Language and Composition

A WALK AROUND WALDEN POND
Guided Readings for Our Transcendentalist Jaunt in Nature

On today's trip, never wander off, and never travel in a group of fewer than three people. Stay on all trails and be smart. Look for the following landmarks with your group. As you reach these, stop and have a member of you group read aloud excerpts from *Walden*.

Concord is the site of three American Revolutions: The Revolutionary War, the Industrial Revolution, and the Literary Revolution (also known as the American Renaissance). Today, we will focus on the revolution of transcendentalism.

STOP #1: THOREAU'S CABIN (model)

Before leaving the parking lot, stop and tour the model of Thoreau's cottage and the statue erected in Thoreau's honor. Read all the historical signs and pick up a map of the trails around the pond. Look at the house as you read this excerpt from *Walden*.

"When I first took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there, which was on Independence Day, or the fourth of July, 1845, my house was not finished for the 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 timber were saturated with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude from them. To my imagination, it retained throughout the day more or less of this auroral character, reminding me of a certain house on a mountain which I had visited the year before. This was an airy and unplastered cabin, fit to entertain a traveling god, and where a goddess might trail her garments. The winds, which passed over my dwelling, were such as sweep over the ridges of mountains, bearing the broken strains or celestial parts only, of terrestrial music. The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it. Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere" (Thoreau 61-62).

STOP #2: THE SHORES OF WALDEN POND

To reach the pond, you must cross a very busy road. Cross at the cross walk, look both ways, and be smart. Proceed down the asphalt hillside path to the banks of Walden Pond. As you gaze at the pond, read this Native American myth of the pond's origin.

"My townsmen have all heard the tradition, the oldest people tell me that they heard it in their youth, that anciently the Indians were holding a pow-wow upon a hill here, which rose as high into the heavens as the pond now sinks deep into the earth, and they used much profanity, as the story goes, though this vice is one of which the Indians were never guilty, and while they were thus engaged, the hill shook and suddenly sank, and only one old squaw, named Walden, escaped, and from her the pond was named. It has been conjectured that when the hill shook, these stones rolled down its side and became the present shore. It is very certain, at any rate, that once there was no pond here and now there is one." (Thoreau 134-135)

STOP #3: THOREAU'S COTTAGE – ORIGINAL SITE

Using your trail map, proceed around the pond in a counter-clockwise circle. Follow the POND PATH. Do not wander away to Heywood's Meadow, etc. Admire Thoreau's cove by look, and head to the original house site. This path is narrow and only can accommodate a single line of people. Be polite to native Concordians out on the trail for their morning exercise. Let them pass you on your leisurely stroll around the woods. When you reach the cabin, read the historical signs and add a stone to the cairn if you wish – but do not take stones away! Read aloud this passage about Thoreau's cabin.

"I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society. When visitors came in larger and unexpected numbers, there was but the third chair for them all, but they generally economized the room by standing up. It is surprising how many great men and women a small house will contain. I have had 25 or 30 souls with their bodies at once under my roof, and yet we often parted without being aware that we had come very near to one another. Many of our houses with their almost innumerable apartments, their huge halls and their cellars for the storage of wines and other munitions of peace, appear to me extravagantly large for their inhabitants... One inconvenience I sometimes experienced in so small a house, was the difficulty of getting to a sufficient distance from my guest when we began to utter the big thoughts in big words. You want room for your thoughts to get into sailing trim and run a course or two before they make their port. The bullet of your thought must have overcome its lateral and ricochet motion and fallen into its last and steady course before it reaches the ear of the hearer, else it may plough out again through the side of his head... I have found it a singular luxury to talk across the pond to a companion on the opposite side." (Thoreau 102-103)

STOP #4: THE FITCHBURG LINE

The pond path will run for a bit along the railroad tracks. If we are lucky, a commuter train will pass during our time in the woods. DO NOT go onto or near the tracks, but stop nearby and read this passage:

"The nation ... lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce and export ice and talk through a telegraph and ride thirty miles an hour without a doubt whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men is a little uncertain. If we do not get out sleepers and forge rails and devote days and nights to the work, but go to tinkering upon our lives to improve them, who will build the railroad? And if railroads are not built, how shall we get to heaven in a season? But if we stay home and mind out business, who will want railroads? We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us ... Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life?" (Thoreau 67)

STOP #5: FULL CIRCLE – BACK TO THE BEACH

You should return back to the beach area by 11 a.m. Spend more time here on the beach, and ponder the following quotations from an interview with Bob Dylan in the May 19, 2009 *Rolling Stone*.

If Dylan had his way, there'd be Sousa bands on main street and vinyl albums instead of CDs. Teenagers would go on nature hikes instead of watching YouTube. "It's peculiar and unnerving in a way to see so many young people walking around with cellphones and iPods in their ears and so wrapped up in media and video games," he says. "It robs them of their self-identity. It's a shame to see them so tuned out to real life. Of course they are free to do that, as if that's got anything to do with freedom. The cost of liberty is high, and young people should understand that before they start spending their life with all those gadgets." (Brinkley 45)

When I question Dylan about his genius for disconnecting from the rat race, he quotes Scipio. "Scipio, the great conqueror of Hannibal, who says, 'I'm never in such good company as when I'm alone.'" To Dylan, this is ancient folk wisdom to live by. ... Later in our conversation, he quotes Scipio again. "'I'm never so busy,'" he says, "'as when I've got nothing to do.' A person's solitude is important," Dylan tells me in teacher mode. "You have to learn about yourself and figure things out, and that's a good way to do it. Obviously, though, too much of it is no good. You can abuse anything." (Brinkley 49)

Before you return to the bus, visit the gift shop, use the facilities, take pictures, sketch drawings, write in a journal, transcend yourself by communing with nature. You should also read this passage with your group:

"Explore thyself ... 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 ... 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 the common hours. ... 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." (Thoreau 236-238)

STOP #7: OLD NORTH BRIDGE

We will have a picnic lunch here. Stroll the national park and read all the historical data. Look for the “Concord Hymn” by Ralph Waldo Emerson on the monument to the bridge. Go to the visitors’ center. Talk to the many guides in the park. Stroll over to the Old Manse and peek in the windows that Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne inscribed with their diamond ring, before they became famous.

Be back on the bus no later than 12:55 p.m.!!!

STOP #6: THE BUS RIDE HOME

OK, so it’s not really a stop, but the ride home is time to reflect on our day at the pond. Take a moment to close your eyes and perhaps meditate on your amazing day away from your daily routine of classes. Ponder how you may have been changed... even for a brief moment.

For those of you who would like extra credit consider the following question and submit your reflection Monday:

Describe one moving moment that you experienced today while at Walden Pond, and explain its relevance to Thoreau’s *Walden* and its significance in your day today. Expand on this idea by reflecting on this moment’s influence on the rest of your life today, and the remainder of your life to come. You may also reference Dylan’s ideas, which parallel Thoreau’s, and truly contemplate your own experience as a part of the “plugged-in” generation.

Works Cited

Brinkley, Douglas. (2009, May 19). Bob Dylan’s America. *Rolling Stone*, 1078, 42-49, 76.

Thoreau, Henry David. (2003). *Walden and Civil Disobedience*. New York: Barnes and Noble. (Original work published 1854).