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CLASSICS

Simon & Schuster Classroom Activities
for the Enriched Classic edition of
Walden and Civil Disobedience by Henry David Thoreau
0-7434-8772-9 • \$4.95 / \$6.95 Can.

Activities created by Robert Marantz

Each of the three activities includes:

- NCTE standards covered
- An estimate of the time needed
- A complete list of materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions
- Questions to help you evaluate the results

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Left or Right?

(A Lesson in Persuasion)

Walden, Henry David Thoreau's meditation on his two-year experiment in simplified living and self-reliance, has been interpreted and reinterpreted with each generation since its publication in 1854. For example, "[t]he countercultural movements of the 1960s claimed Walden as a literal prescription for life and dubbed Thoreau the first hippie [while] ...Political conservatives have celebrated Walden as a doctrine of rugged individualism..." (page ix). He has also been called an environmentalist, a humanist, and a crank.

In today's highly politicized environment of red states and blue states, it would be fascinating to speculate how Thoreau would be labeled by modern pundits. Is he a liberal or a conservative? Does his doctrine of simplified living fall more on the left side of the political aisle or the right side? Students will engage this question in the form of a debate.

This lesson will take two class periods: one for each side of the debate to prepare their points and counterpoints, and one for the actual debate. (Alternately, you can allow the class several class periods, or portions or several periods, to prepare.)

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. 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.
7. 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

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sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8. Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What to Do:

1. Begin the lesson with a brief discussion about how liberals and conservatives are defined today. Write the two terms on the board and ask students to describe each term. Write down what they say. (This will work best if the students are currently or have already studied modern politics in their social studies classes.)

2. Divide the class in half. One half will argue in favor of Thoreau as a modern liberal thinker; the other half will argue that Thoreau espouses today's conservative ideals. Instruct the class that each side will be required to offer three points to support their position. Each side should also prepare opening and closing statements, and should be ready to rebut the points of the opposing side. A different student will be responsible for each of these eight elements. If there are more than eight students on each side, the additional students will be responsible for taking notes on the other side's argument.

3. Each point that is cited must come from Walden and "Civil Disobedience". For example, the side arguing that Thoreau demonstrates liberal ideas might use his advocacy of a simplified life, free from materialism, while the side arguing his conservative pedigree might use this same example to support the argument that he is by nature a conservative. Other incidents that can be analyzed in this manner include his discovery of Native American artifacts in the bean field, his visit with Alex Therien, and the night he spends with John Field and his family. Teams will have one class period to find and hone their talking points.

4. The debate will follow this format: Each side will present its opening statement—30 seconds each; The "For" side will then have one minute to present its first point; the "Against" side will have 30 seconds to rebut that point, and then one minute to present its first point; the "For" side gets an opportunity to rebut that point (within the 30 second time limit), and then make its second point (one minute); and so on. When all six points have been presented and rebutted, each side gets one minute to make a closing statement.

5. When the debate is over, lead a discussion in which each side evaluates how the other side did. They must consider how well the other side presented its argument, and not

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whether one side was correct and the other wrong. Ask them: How clear was the other side's thesis? How well did the other side use evidence? On a scale from one to ten, how effective was the other side and why? The key here is to tie the idea of a good thesis and strong evidence with the topic of persuasive arguments.

What You Need:

A copy of the enriched classics edition of Walden and "Civil Disobedience" (ISBN: 0743487729) for each student

How Did It Go?

Were there any arguments that one side failed to offer that might have strengthened their position? Using the students' evaluations of each other as a starting point, you can analyze how effectively the students developed their theses, cited evidence from Walden, and presented their ideas.

“The Simple Life” (A Lesson in Theme)

More than 150 years have passed since Thoreau entered the woods at Walden Pond. He left a society that was on the brink of technological advances brought on by the Industrial Revolution. He purposely chose to abandon the creature comforts of his time in order to test himself. Could he survive in nature with only bare essentials and his own wits?

It is often difficult for today’s readers to relate to Thoreau’s experiment. Perhaps it is because he does not go into sufficient detail about what he left behind so a modern reader does not appreciate what Thoreau had and did not have at his disposal.

What would you need to survive for a year in the wild a la Thoreau? This is the central question behind this lesson. Students will consider the minimum that is needed to simply exist, and then step into Thoreau’s shoes by living their lives with only those bare necessities for a week. In doing so, students will gain a deeper appreciation of Thoreau’s experiment and his writing in Walden.

This lesson will take one and a half class periods plus one week out-of-class time.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

What to Do:

1. Begin the lesson by asking students what they would take with them if they were going to live in the woods for a year. Write their answers on the board. How practical is the list that your students are assembling? Note the number of practical items (i.e. an axe) versus impractical items (i.e. Play Station Portable).
2. Next, describe Thoreau's Walden Pond experiment in general terms to the class. As summarized on page vii of the Introduction, Thoreau "...leaves behind the things he knows and goes into the woods to test who he is and how he should live."
3. Distribute Handout #1 to the class. Have a student read each of the items that Thoreau brought with him into the woods in 1854. Ask the class, why did he bring each of these items? What was the purpose of each item? Now ask the students to reconsider the items they would bring. Ask, "What would you absolutely need to survive for a year in the wild a la Thoreau?"
4. Have the students complete Handout #1 by compiling a list of up to 12 items they would bring with them into the woods. The students must provide a reason for each item they choose.
5. Compare students' lists to Thoreau's. How many of the students' items are items of convenience (i.e. mp3 players)? How many are items of necessity that either did not exist in 1854 or were not considered by Thoreau (i.e. a first aid kit)? Ask the class, "Would it be easier or harder to live in the wild for a year today or in 1854? Why?"
6. Next, assign a project to the students: They will reduce their lives to the bare essentials for one week and keep a daily journal about the experience. The class as a whole will come up with and agree to the list of the bare essentials. For example, food is essential, but television is not. Write down their suggestions on the board. If an item seems too much of a convenience, challenge the student who suggested it to explain his reasons. Before class ends, the list must be complete and each student must agree to adhere to this list.
7. At some point in the week, students must spend at least one hour in an outdoor location, be it a park, a golf course, etc. Students should record the sensations they experience as they see, hear, smell, and feel nature around them (a la Thoreau).
8. At the end of the week, collect the journals. Some students will produce a good volume of writing, especially during their time in nature. You can have your students use their journal entries as first drafts for personal essays about self-reliance, nature versus technology, consumerism, or other topics that students end up exploring in their writing.

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What You Need:

A copy of the enriched classics edition of Walden and "Civil Disobedience" (ISBN: 0743487729) for each student, and Handout #1

How Did It Go?

From their journals, you will be able to gauge how invested your students became in this assignment, and thus the central idea behind Walden. How many of your students embraced this activity and came to understand what Thoreau was trying to do--live simply--and how hard it was?

“The Legacy of Creative Protest” (A Lesson in Rhetoric)

In the second chapter of his autobiography, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote of Thoreau:

I became convinced that noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. No other person has been more eloquent and passionate in getting this idea across than Henry David Thoreau. As a result of his writings and personal witness, we are the heirs of a legacy of creative protest. The teachings of Thoreau came alive in our civil rights movement; indeed, they are more alive than ever before. Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a freedom ride into Mississippi, a peaceful protest in Albany, Georgia, a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, these are outgrowths of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and that no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice.

Similarly, Thoreau's writing, “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,” influenced Gandhi in his struggle against British rule in India. During the Vietnam War, musicians wrote and performed songs that challenged the United States' role in Southeast Asia. These leaders and artists are all “heirs of a legacy of creative protest” started by Henry David Thoreau.

In this lesson we will examine how Thoreau's “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience” has inspired non-violent protests and social movements of the past 50 years.

This lesson will take two class periods plus two or three days outside of class to complete the homework assignment.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 words

identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What to Do:

1. Start the lesson by reading the following excerpt from “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience.”

How does it become a man to behave toward the American government today? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the *slave’s* government also. “Civil Disobedience,” (Thoreau, page 363)

2. Next, read the following excerpt from Martin Luther King:

In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law. *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (King, Jr.)

3. Ask the class, what idea does Thoreau challenge and what idea does he advocate in these 42 words? How is Thoreau’s renunciation of the American government similar to King’s refusal to follow an “unjust law”? What action do both Thoreau and King advocate in regard to injustice? How often do we hear people today proscribe non-violent action to solve a problem? Have the class call out some advantages and disadvantages to taking non-violent action over violent action to demonstrate protest, citing historical or personal examples where possible.

4. Now transition the class to protest music. Explain that many songwriters have used their art to express either their support for various social movements or their outrage over various injustices. Play one, two, or all three of the following songs (after handing out the lyrics to the songs selected).

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- "Fortunate Son" by Credence Clearwater Revival protests the Vietnam War, specifically the disproportionate number of poor young men who were drafted to fight while rich young men stayed home.
- "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" by Bob Dylan recounts the murder of a black woman and the trial of her white murderer—he only received a 6 month sentence for his crime.
- "Why?" by Tracey Chapman posits that our democracy is that in name only, because we allow poverty, war, and violence against women to continue unabated.

The lyrics to each of these three songs, as well as most other songs, can be found on the Internet.

5. Ask the class: How does the songwriter evoke the idea of civil disobedience as espoused by Thoreau? While these songs protest perceived injustices, do any of them offer solutions (like Thoreau and King do)? Why or why not?
6. For homework, have students work in pairs to write, draw, or film a protest about something that concerns them. (It could be war, racism, sexism, drug abuse, child abuse, etc.) In addition to describing the problem, students must offer a non-violent solution. Allow two to three days for the students to complete this assignment.
7. Devote part or the entirety of the next available lesson for students to present their work to the class. Work should be evaluated on how well the students defined their problem and its possible solution, with additional points given for the presentation's creativity.

What You Need:

A copy of the enriched classics edition of Walden and "Civil Disobedience" (ISBN: 0743487729) for each student, a CD player, and print outs of song lyrics

How Did It Go?

This lesson has the potential to energize students, especially those involved in social causes or who are fans of music that is infused with socially conscious or relevant themes. You may find that some of your more reserved students are the most stimulated by this activity.

Encourage your students to get their work published in the local newspaper, the school's newspaper, or its literary magazine (if appropriate). This positive reinforcement can pay dividends in your classroom beyond this lesson.

Did any of your students suggest that non-violent is not advantageous to social change? This is an astute viewpoint and the basis for recurring debates in social science circles and would be well worth exploring through further class discussion.

Packing Lightly

Here are the 12 items Thoreau had with him when he went into the woods at Walden Pond in 1854. What 12 items would you bring today and why?

*1 axe
2 knives
1 fork*

*3 plates
1 cup
1 spoon*

*a jug for oil
a jug for molasses
1 lamp*

<u>Item</u>	<u>Why I would take it</u>
1. _____	_____ _____
2. _____	_____ _____
3. _____	_____ _____
4. _____	_____ _____
5. _____	_____ _____
6. _____	_____ _____
7. _____	_____ _____
8. _____	_____ _____
9. _____	_____ _____
10. _____	_____ _____
11. _____	_____ _____
12. _____	_____ _____