

Lesson Plans

- Title: “Native American Contexts for Thoreau”
 - **Description:** Thoreau was famous among his contemporaries for his fascination with Native Americans, and his writing documents his life-long interest in Native people, from his account of finding “Tahattawan’s arrowhead” in an early journal to the “Indian wisdom” he celebrates in “Natural History of Massachusetts” to his journeys through the Maine Woods with Penobscot guides. The ten volumes of the Indian Notebooks, where he gathered quotes from every source he could find on Native culture, show the depth of that interest. What is less clear is how well he understood Native culture and whether he ever moved beyond the Romantic stereotypes of the “noble savage” or the constraints of settler colonialism. In this assignment, students will look at three excerpts by 19th-century Native writers – David Cusick (Tuscarora), William Apess (Pequot/Mashpee) and Joseph Nicolai (Penobscot) – in order to gauge how well Thoreau’s work aligns with Native issues and perspectives. Where does Thoreau’s work resonate with these writings? What does he miss?
 - Link: [Teaching Thoreau: Native American Contexts](#)
 - Link: [David Cusick, from Sketches of the Ancient History of the Six Nations](#)
 - Link: [William Apess, from Indian Nullification](#)
 - Link: [Joseph Nicolai, from Life and Traditions of the Red Man](#)
- Title: Simplifying Our Carbon Footprint: *Walden* and Climate Change
 - **Description:** This is an activity or assignment suitable for a range of students who have read part or all of *Walden* and are thinking about sustainability. Thoreau’s plea to simplify, to pare down our lives to their essentials, was powerful when he wrote it at the beginning of the era of global consumer capitalism; it’s essential now. In this assignment, students begin by carefully reading the key passage in “Where I Lived and What I Lived For” where Thoreau describes why he went to the woods and makes his plea for simplicity. Then, they make a list of their possessions. They then look over this list and decide what is essential and what are superfluous details. After they’ve had a chance to write and discuss their analysis of their possessions, they will fill out a carbon footprint calculator - this one from UC Berkley is simple and has great contextual information. After students have completed the calculator, write and discuss. Which aspects of their lives have the most impact on the climate - for good or bad? How might Thoreau offer guidance about how to live more sustainably?
 - Link: [Teaching Thoreau: Simplifying our Carbon Footprint](#)
 - Link: Cool Climate Network - [Carbon Footprint Calculator](#)

- Title: “Encoding the *Walden* manuscript in TEI”
 - **Description:** This sample assignment was created by Prof. Rebecca Nesvet at the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay, who is a member of the [Digital Thoreau](#) editorial team. Nesvet shared the assignment as part of a virtual conference on “[Editing and Encoding in the Undergraduate Classroom](#)” hosted at SUNY Geneseo October 2020. The assignment can easily be adapted to apply to passages other than the one Nesvet and her students worked on. Moreover, the assignment’s prompts for examining the manuscript and asking questions of Thoreau’s drafting process can be used with or without the encoding exercise. This and other assignments involving the *Walden* manuscript are further described in an essay co-authored by Nesvet, Schacht, and other members of the Digital Thoreau editorial team, “[Encountering *Walden*](#).”
 - **Link:** <https://wp.geneseo.edu/dse/materials/>
 - **Link:** <https://digitalthoreau.org/the-walden-manuscript-project/>
 - **Link:** <https://scholarlyediting.org/issues/39/encountering-walden>

- Title: “Annotating Thoreau”
 - **Description:** This assignment asks students to engage directly with one or more of the Thoreau texts available at [The Readers’ Thoreau](#), a website for reading Thoreau socially by annotating his texts in the margins. There are numerous ways that this assignment could play out—or, to put it another way, there are many different assignments that students can undertake with the texts on the site. As an instructor, you can request a dedicated group for your class to make it easier for students in the class to see and respond to one another’s annotations (and, if you like, to limit the visibility of your class’s annotations to the class alone). You might ask students to pick a passage in *Walden*, say, and explain how Thoreau’s description of his experience in the passage is like or unlike their own. You might ask them to find a recording of one of the sounds Thoreau describes and embed the recording in their annotation. You might ask them to do the same with sights in the book and photographs. You might ask them to pick two passages in a single work, or one each from two different works, and link the two annotations together as a way to explore similarities and differences between them. Or you might ask them to do some historical or literary-critical research on one or more passages and use their annotation to share the knowledge they’ve discovered with the rest of the class.
 - **Link:** <https://commons.digitalthoreau.org>

- Title: “Becoming *Walden*”
 - This assignment invites students to understand that writing, for Thoreau, was not merely a way to communicate ideas but a way to discover what he thought. In so doing, it invites them to consider the value of writing, for themselves, as a means of discovery. Students begin by locating a passage of *Walden* that Thoreau revised at least once and perhaps multiple times across the seven extant drafts of his manuscript. They can find many such passages by examining the [fluid-text edition](#) of *Walden* published by [Digital Thoreau](#). From there, one path they could take would be to write a short essay describing Thoreau’s changes from the first manuscript version of the passage to the version of the passage as it appeared in the published *Walden* of 1854, hypothesizing about the reasons for these changes—in part, perhaps, by comparing how the different versions affect the meaning of larger wholes (the

passage in full, the chapter to which the passage belongs, the entire work). Another path might be to leave one or more annotations on the passage in the published *Walden* as found at [The Readers' Thoreau](#). Unlike the “encoding *Walden*” assignment described above, this one doesn't require students to engage directly with the manuscript of *Walden*, only the fluid-text transcription. However, they can find the manuscript leaves that correspond to many fluid-text passages using Digital Thoreau's [manuscript search tool](#). By following the instructions above the search table, they can even embed manuscript images in their essays or annotations.

- **Link:** <https://digitalthoreau.org/fluid-text-toc/>
- **Link:** <https://digitalthoreau.org/manuscript-search-tool/>
- **Link:** <https://commons.digitalthoreau.org/walden/>

- **Title:** “The Walden Soundscape”
 - **Description:** The Walden Soundscape project is an open-access teaching resource that calls attention to the musicality of Thoreau's philosophy and writing, and serves to immerse readers of *Walden* in the visual and sonic landscape of the pond and surrounding woods. Katopodis recorded sounds at the pond in all four seasons, and created companion stop-motion animation videos that offer users a guided walk around the pond in each season (go for a [guided walk](#)). The [sound map](#) is a space for self-guided exploration with key terms and exercises to aid in aural analysis. The [podcast](#) provides some biographical and historical context and interviews with Thoreau scholars.
 - **Link:** <https://thewaldensoundscape.com/>

- **Title:** “Fold/Unfold” Group Work Activity for Guided Close Readings of *Walden* in Class
 - **Description:** This is a guided, scaffolded close reading assignment to do with students in class. Students practice reading individually, discussing questions first in pairs and then with a larger group of 4-6 students, and summarizing discussions to others. They practice critical thinking, research (in some cases), listening, collaboration, and communication skills.
 - **Link:** https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yf4L8wmpZahukMqu3s-nh0_QtNwiX2SJ3aJ5yyLo3QU/edit?usp=sharing

- **Title:** “Sound Recordings: Useful Tools for Teaching Loons in *Walden*”
 - **Description:** This is a lesson plan for teaching the loon passage in *Walden*. Katopodis shares links to recordings of loons making a variety of sounds and a description of how she uses these recordings in her undergraduate American Literature survey class. Katopodis uses these sound recordings to deepen students' close readings of Thoreau's relationship to nature, which is at times elusive and tumultuous.
 - **Link:** <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cfoUqqJFGfUtYtqSjnM79gip11sUxeZJZUm06NpdLYk/edit?usp=sharing>

- **Title:** “Teaching Climate Change in the Humanities”
 - **Description:** This is an ongoing collaborative. The website is a growing resource for anyone interested in teaching climate change in the humanities and social sciences, offering resources and reading lists that can be integrated into a college course syllabus. The resources are intended to be useful for humanities and literature

instructors who are interested in developing syllabi, or adding climate change/climate justice units to their courses, as well as for instructors in the sciences and social sciences who might want to include a discussion of literary texts in their classes.

There is one page devoted to teaching Thoreau's *Walden*.

Link: <https://teachingclimatechange.org/>