

**Writing and Walking, Pilgrimage and Process:
Working with the Essays of Linda Hogan and Henry David Thoreau**

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Walking, I am listening in a deeper way.

--Linda Hogan, "Walking"

What is it that makes it so hard sometimes to determine whether we will walk? I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright.

--Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"

1. Abstract

The curriculum, "Writing and Walking, Pilgrimage and Process," explores two essays dealing with the subject of walking, one by Linda Hogan, and one by Henry David Thoreau. This curriculum will be delivered in a series of student centered conceptual workshops. The curriculum will: outline the elements of implicit and explicit arguments; discuss the stylistic elements of the personal reflective essay and the thesis-driven essay; identify and interpret the use of symbolism, rhetorical devices such as irony, and other literary techniques; and will also engage students in discussions about natural history, gender, as well as social and environmental justice within a historic and cultural context. This curriculum will also include experiential workshops that explore an ongoing sense of narrative as the foundation for thought, experience, and sense of place.

Students will engage in a rich understanding of their own sense of language, identity, and place through developing a personal practice of "writing and walking." Through this process, they will develop an understanding of the narrative relationship between inner and outer stories in texts, as well as the shifting "inner and outer" awareness of their own "voice." Finally, students will be guided through a series of writing and editing activities that evolve into a personal essay about place, and a research project and paper.

Students . . .

- ❖ develop a practice of writing and walking;
- ❖ explore how writing and walking are a process of pilgrimage and reflection;
- ❖ explore how writers and "walkers" use their senses to experience and describe places, past, present, and future;
- ❖ explore elements of implicit and explicit arguments;
- ❖ explore dynamics of inner and outer narratives;
- ❖ discuss the stylistic and structural elements of the personal reflective-essay, and the thesis-driven essay;

- ❖ identify and understand the use of metaphor, symbolism, rhetorical devices (such as irony), and other literary techniques;
- ❖ engage in a rich understanding about language, identity, and place;
- ❖ engage in discussions about social and environmental justice within a rich historic and cultural context;
- ❖ use their understanding to craft and edit personal essays about place.

No method or discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever on the alert. What is a course of history, or philosophy, or poetry, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen? Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer? Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity.

--Thoreau, *Walden*

2. Introduction and Overview

a) Introductory information about the context, rationale, and purpose for this activity, the type(s) of courses for which this activity would be appropriate, etc.

I have been contrasting Hogan and Thoreau's works, along with a variety of other readings, workshops, and curriculum activities related to eco-criticism, environmental philosophy, bioregional literacy, and sustainability for use in composition and writing courses, as well as classes in literature, humanities, and environmental education at four-year liberal arts colleges. By looking closely at Hogan and Thoreau's essays, students develop the foundation to look critically at other writers and are challenged to become critical writers and thinkers as they begin to live "deliberately"¹ as productive citizens who are able to express their own sense of identity and place.

Within this context, I have created a series of syllabi, readings, and workshops for use in full-time and part-time, interdisciplinary, undergraduate and graduate classes at the Evergreen State College (1996-present), as well as in beginning (English 101), intermediate (English102), and advanced (English 306) composition courses at St. Martin's University (2001-present). Students in the classes range from freshman, taking their first composition or literature classes, to mixed groups that represent diverse ages, ethnic, social, economic, cultural, and political groups, to advanced or graduate students working on special topics in Literature or Environmental Studies. Some classes run for fifty-minutes and meet daily; others meet for four to eight-hour blocks, once or twice a week. Some classes run for a semester, others for a quarter. This variety has given me the opportunity to test activities, assignments, and approaches with diverse audiences of learners. Based on the range of my experiences, I believe that these workshops can be used with both graduate and undergraduate students and can adapted for the purposes of most campuses.

Initially, students are guided through a series of conceptual workshops modeled on the work of Don Finkel, author of *Teaching With Your Mouth Shut*. The key is to get students to think critically about the art and craft of writing by reading texts carefully, engaging with the questions that the authors raise, identifying the structural and stylistic devices that the authors use, and translating this understanding into their own writing and to peer editing workshops. Though it is helpful to give brief lectures to frame ideas, during the workshops the instructor circulates between groups to facilitate and offer guidance, and the students do the talking.

These conceptual workshops are similar, so students become accustomed to their structure and format, deepening their ideas and becoming more comfortable with the concepts through experience. Working collaboratively in small groups, they take on leadership roles and demonstrate intellectual engagement as they begin to find their voice and opinions in conversations "about" the texts. They are forced to look carefully at the texts and use specific language to discuss various structural and stylistic

¹ Henry David Thoreau, from, *Walden*. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately..."

elements. By asking questions, using examples, and through context, they decode the language and vocabulary of the “composition.” (HECB: English College Readiness Definitions A.2, A.3, A.4, B.5, B.6²)

b) Time and Location Frames: How much class-time, and/or how much of the course this activity will require to carry out. When an instructor might use this activity in the term.

These workshops are foundational, and I use them at the beginning of a program to give students the context for thinking about their work in both writing and sustainability. Because they are complex and challenging, students return to these concepts throughout the course in order to refine their writing and ideas. Each workshop, along with other coursework, takes a week to present and discuss, and I allow for a full five or six weeks to develop the walking workshops and follow-up activities that evolve into final drafts of their personal essays.

I originally designed these workshops for classes that met for four-hour blocks once or twice a week, and I believe that they are best used in the context of a “writing retreat” format. However, I have also successfully adapted them for classes that meet for fifty minutes, three days a week, or ninety minutes two days a week. During the workshops, students read the essays aloud to create community and to reinforce the oral aspects of language. They participate in in-depth discussions that run from one to two hours. They also do improvisational writings or guided workshops about their own sense of memory, meaning, and place, either in or outside of class.

These workshops are followed up by a series of in-class writing activities and projects that allow students to make connections to their own work, and allow the editing of other students’ essays. The same techniques and protocols are used throughout the course, as students complete a series of personal and thesis driven essays that are connected to local and global issues.

c) Learning outcomes, including “big idea(s)” within the discipline and sustainability “big idea(s),” and skills or habits of mind the activity fosters.

Linda Hogan and Henry David Thoreau draw upon the ancient tradition of the pilgrimage or quest as a way of creating identity and a connection to place. Though they speak from different cultures, genders, time-periods, and philosophical traditions, they represent, along with other naturalist writers, a strong American tradition of walking as an expression of engagement with the natural world. For example, Mary Austin’s classic essay “Walking Woman,” Rebecca Solnit’s *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, John Muir’s “Windstorm in the Forests,” along with works by Gary Snyder, Terry Tempest Williams, Annie Dillard, and many others. During the time that students are completing the workshops on Hogan and Thoreau, they are reading a number of other essays that explore these themes outside of class. By comparing and contrasting various authors’ works, students develop a complex understanding of their own identity and sense of place, the historical and cultural context around issues of sustainability and environmental ethics, and a sense of writing and walking as a process, not simply a product or a destination.

However, by focusing on and comparing the essays by Hogan and Thoreau, students are challenged to go deeply into the works. They not only find common themes that they might not have expected between two writers with such different approaches and backgrounds, they are challenged to explore the differences between them. They engage in discussions around the structure and form of the essays. They look at the difference between implicit and explicit arguments, and between personal reflective-essays and thesis-driven essays. They identify symbols, rhetorical devices, and other

² All HECB notations are from the *Higher Education Coordinating Board, English College Readiness Definitions, Preliminary Draft, January 2007, for the State of Washington.*

techniques. They also explore the context and audience from which each writer works. Questions of language, identity, gender, culture, race, social and political justice emerge.

By setting up meaningful juxtapositions between texts, such as those between transcendental philosophers and contemporary writers, students illuminate our times as well as theirs. Students develop a complex understanding, and are inspired to develop their own writings and sense of identity, as they put the concept of “the American dream” into perspective with issues of sustainability and the common good. In the context of other works on identity and sustainability, students explore the split in the American psyche that is both deeply connected to, and conflicted about, the connection to the natural world. They make the connection between the current environmental crisis and many of the social and political issues looming in Antebellum American before the Civil war. They reflect critically and personally about the idealism and dilemma of the “American Dream” from a broad historical, social, ethnic, philosophical, and literary context. As they become grounded in issues of civic responsibility and sustainability, they also gain awareness of their reflective capacities and work as writers.

d) Appropriate use for other disciplines

These activities could be used in courses on American Literature, Eco-Criticism, Writing, Environmental Education, Environmental Studies, Natural History, Sustainability, Social and Environmental Justice, Environmental Philosophy, Eco-Psychology, Feminist Studies, History, and Civics.

In wildness is the preservation of the world.

--Henry David Thoreau, “Walking”

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to confront 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.

--Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

3. Actual learning activities

a) Set-up or preliminaries, main learning activities/assignment/tasks, incremental activities, readings, discussions, short assignments, etc.

Workshop 1: “Walking,” with Linda Hogan (1.5 hours, or 2 fifty-minute sessions)

The focus of this workshop is a close analysis and reading of Hogan's essay. This document details, step by step, a student centered in-class conceptual workshop that draws upon the long tradition of the pilgrimage or quest as a way of creating identity and a connection to place. Students are introduced to many of the formal elements of writing the personal essay through the example of Hogan’s work.

Workshop 2: “Walking,” with Henry David Thoreau. (1.5 hours, or 2 fifty-minute sessions)

The focus of this workshop is on a close analysis and reading of Thoreau's essay. This document details a second student-centered in-class conceptual workshop. By comparing and contrasting the essays of Hogan and Thoreau, students begin to understand elements of the essay and to contrast their identities and purposes as writers, working within a particular social and historical context. They also begin to develop a more complex understanding of their own identity and sense of place, the historical and cultural context around issues of sustainability and environmental ethics today, and a sense of writing and walking as a process, not simply a destination.

Workshop 3: Writing & Walking, Pilgrimage & Process—Exploring Inner and Outer Narratives
(5 one-hour sessions, outside of class.)

This workshop/activity develops a sense of personal identity, community affiliation, and belonging as students find and explore their own spaces, places, and experiences. They develop their reflections, along with their sense of inner and outer narratives, past, present, and future awareness, and develop an ability to evoke the senses with descriptive language. This activity must be done in five, one-hour blocks of time, and can continue for up to five weeks.

There are a number of stages and steps in setting up these assignments, depending on the students' background, location, time frame, and whether an accessible outdoor setting is available. In general, the workshops are given early in the course, along with a set of core reading and writing responses and writing prompts that are determined by the subject of the class. Students read and discuss the essays, then begin focused writings that relate to some of the issues that the essays address. These include: language, people, places, pilgrimage, and inner and outer reflection, research, civic responsibility, and so on. Ideally, these workshops are taught in a "writing-retreat" format, where students have access to the outdoors and large blocks of time to work. However, I have taught them in enclosed classrooms with fifty-minute schedules. The point is, students reflect on the concepts that these essays and workshops generate as they are guided through the process of careful textual analysis, journaling, writing, and editing.

Students will. . .

- ❖ read and write responses to the two essays;
- ❖ participate in classroom workshops/discussions about the essays;
- ❖ evaluate their participation in workshops and seminar discussions;
- ❖ use the essays as "springboards" for writing their own personal essays about place which they develop through steps and stages;
- ❖ participate in a series of writing/walking workshops;
- ❖ complete pre-writing, writing, and research assignments;
- ❖ use careful textual analysis for working in peer-editing groups;
- ❖ meet with faculty for conferences on drafts of their essays;
- ❖ complete revisions of their essays,

Walking as an act perception and creativity:

As students explore the nuances of these essays and assignments, they are introduced to the long history of walking, writing, and pilgrimage at the root of much environmental literature and human experience. Many questions are considered in this assignment. What is it about the act of walking and reflection that has inspired so many people? Who are famous walkers, past and present? How do their stories of journeys inspire us? How is the act of walking perceived today? How do people who are "walkers" experience the world differently? How do we observe, and how does walking effect our perception and thinking? How is walking and physical activity tied into our creative process?

How might walking help us solve problems? How do millions of years of walking tap into our human potentials? Can getting back into our senses and body, animate our sense of being alive and connected to nature? What are the different rhythms and paces that we use? How is walking tied into the rhythms of our breath? Given our contemporary modes of transportation, does walking have the same effect today as it has in the past? What about electronic forms of writing and communication? How do these new mediums of transportation and communication affect our sense of identity and place? How does contemporary society idealize or impede our experience of "walking."

Walking as an act of conscience & communion:

How is walking not only an act of reflection, but also an act of conscience? What is the civic conscience of Thoreau and Hogan? What does Thoreau mean when he says, “In wildness is the preservation of the world?” Walking is not superfluous or merely peaceful, it is about total engagement and commitment. What is the role between activism and reflection, walking and writing? Do civic acts always have to fall within a public realm? Is mindfulness itself a civic act? How might we make a claim that thoughtfulness and reflection is a civic activity?

How is walking an act of awareness and communion with the world around us? How does walking connect macrocosm and microcosm, and connect our awareness of our inner and outer worlds? What is it about a single sun-flower that connects Hogan to thousands, “in a world of elemental attention, of all things working together?” How are we connected or disconnected from the creatures and places around us? How do personal acts become global? How do our choices affect each other and the world around us? How are we affected by what other people do in the world? What is a day of indulgence like, compared to a day of living “deliberately?” What is the overlap between our public and private spaces? Can we be in a public space privately, and if so, what are the challenges?

When we walk, how do we listen to the inner voices of our thoughts, and the outer voices around us? What are the voices of the natural world, and how do we think about the “wild?” How do we attend to inner and outer dialogues? What are the inner and outer narratives that we

listen to as we walk? How might exploring dynamics of inner and outer narratives uncover layers of meaning about identity and place? How do these dynamics play out in our writing? How do we follow the inner and outer narratives of other writers? How do inner and outer narratives connect us to specific events, people, and places? How do they shape meaning and help us make universal connections?

Writing & Walking as ways to shape meaning:

Students also gain an understanding of the various structural, stylistic, rhetorical, and formal devices of the personal and academic essay. They engage in an analysis “of two or more texts addressing the same topic”(HECB: English College Readiness Definitions A.2) by contrasting narratives to uncover cultural, historic, literary, natural history, and gender perspectives about language, identity, and place. They are guided through a series of “in-class” conceptual workshops and discussions and use their understanding to reflect on the purpose and methods of other writers, as well as to gain perspective on their own writing. Finally, they participate in a series of workshops and reflections on “writing and walking” that develop their reflective capacities and make connections between reading, writing, and personal experience (HECB: A.5). They use their experience and understanding to complete a series of writing and editing assignments, and they use these writings to craft a personal essay about place.

Summary

First students discuss the techniques of Hogan, and then of Thoreau. In response, they participate in a series of five “writing and walking” workshop activities that inspire them to write their own essays of pilgrimage and place. Finally, they extend what they have learned into reading other works, understanding their own work as writers, working on personal and academic essays, editing the essays of other students in peer-review workshops, and developing a sophisticated understanding of the form and elements of the essay.

We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking.

--Henry David Thoreau, Walden

4, Assessment elements [I would like feedback on how to further develop the writing assessment protocols. Suggestions?](#)

These activities work well with audiences of mixed-aged students, or groups with diverse backgrounds. Students with more experience take on leadership roles, and guide the group carefully through each workshop. However, when working with less experienced students, it is important to have a “measurable outcome.” They are less experienced in working carefully with texts, and need encouragement to stay “focused” on the questions. Make it clear that their responsibility is to keep focused and engaged on close analysis of the texts.

The instructor can model careful “readings” of the texts, by discussing the essays with the whole class, before they break into small groups. Key terms should be defined, and students should have written reading responses or selected or examples from the two works. The instructor might also want to work on the first few questions of the workshop with the entire group. When students work in small groups, have them appoint roles for each group member. Their roles could include a time-keeper, a scribe, and an oral reader of each question as the group is ready for it. Have students take “notes” of the ideas that come up and give a summary of their group’s discussion at the end of each class session. Have them do a free-writing activity at the end of the workshop. Make sure that they turn them in, or file them in their portfolio for review.

Seminar Self-Assessment: At the end of each workshop, students should fill out a self-evaluation form, and reflect on their participation.

I meet with students in conferences, to give them specific feedback on their writing, as well as to discuss their participation and leadership in workshops. (See resources, below.)

Reading Thoreau is like taking in a million thoughts in one breath.

Kristine Kaneshiro

SMU English 101 (2007), Midterm Examination

At this point, Henry noticed a spider web in the grape vines and turned to contemplate it. I waited to resume conversation, but he proceeded to retreat to the shed and shut the door. I could see having Henry for a companion wasn’t going to be an exactly peaceful alliance.

--Taylor Pitman,

TESC, Transcendental Visions (2005), Personal Essay

5. Teacher notes: What I saw; what you might see.

Students occasionally become polarized in their views about one or the other of the authors. In general, students interested in social justice and environmental activism are impatient with Thoreau’s brusque attitude towards his readers, though they admire his mental agility and philosophy. I generally have them look at “Civil Disobedience,” “Slavery in Massachusetts,” “The Fugitive Slave Law,” or other political works. At times I have had students develop an antagonistic attitude towards him. I challenge them to look at his time and audience for and compare his work to current issues in social and environmental justice, as well as the influence he had on Gandhi, Mandela, King, Abbey, Muir, and others. Thoreau has a great sense of humor, and is often speaking ironically. He knows his audience. Like Jonathan Swift, he often uses wit, humor, and irony as rhetorical tools to say unexpected things, and to keep his audience entertained.

I have been surprised to find that less experienced students often gravitate towards Thoreau. They project a kindly “authority” onto him, and tend to idealize him. They appreciate his cynicism and

wit, and enjoy finding “quotes” which they can use to frame their own ideas. I encourage them to appreciate him, but also to look critically at his work.

Most students feel a strong affinity with Linda Hogan. Her language is concise, and she tells her story with a seeming ease. Once they decode her style, they try to emulate her ability to move from the outer world of descriptive details to the inner world of universal meanings. Internalizing her work improves their writing tremendously. However, occasionally, I have had young or inexperienced students who are confused about the purpose of Hogan’s essay. They are able to identify (and even identify with) Thoreau’s thesis—“that in wildness is the preservation of the world.” However, even after workshops and seminar discussions, they seem at a loss to define the implicit argument that Hogan presents about the cycles of life and interconnection between things, the symbolism of the sunflower, and so on. After they have done a series of “in-class writing” workshops about place, written their own personal essay, and looked at a variety of other writings, I have them “revisit” Thoreau and Hogan in an essay question on a mid-term examination.

6. Biography: **Rebecca Chamberlain** is a Northwest writer, storyteller, and scholar whose work is rooted in a love of nature and myth. She did graduate work in medieval literature, Native American language and storytelling traditions, and has a background in literature, the arts, environmental education, and cultural studies. She has developed a variety of workshops and curriculum activities related to bioregional literacy and sustainability for use in composition, literature, and humanities courses. She currently teaches interdisciplinary courses at the Evergreen State College, as well as classes for Lesley University, St. Martin’s University, and Antioch University. Rebecca is a certified yoga instructor and a Mountaineer. She climbed Mt. Rainier on July 12, 2008, the anniversary of Thoreau’s birthday.

7. Resources

a) Selected Readings:

Austin, Mary, “The Walking Woman,” *Atlantic Monthly* No. 100 (1907), pp. 216-20.

Atkinson, Brooks (ed.). *Henry David Thoreau: Walden and Other Writings*, Modern Library: 2000.

Chamberlain, Rebecca. “The Power of Story: Words on the Wing,” *Liberating Voices! A Pattern Language For Communication Revolution*. Ed. Doug Schuler. Boston: MIT Press, 2008.

<http://www.publicsphereproject.org/patterns/pattern.pl/public?pattern_id=493>

Explores various views on pattern, landscape, and language, and suggests some ideas about Thoreau’s concept of “tawny grammar.”

_____. “The Earth Is our First Teacher: A Poetics of Language and Place.”

Explores a poetics and ecology of language and place within various philosophical, educational, and literary perspectives, including Thoreau and the Transcendentalists. Olympia, WA, 2006.

_____. Academic Web Page at The Evergreen State College (TESC)

< <http://academic.evergreen.edu/c/chambreb/> >

Includes various course syllabi, program “readers,” curriculum activities, texts and resources.

Elbow, Peter. *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Finch, Robert, and John Elder (Eds). *Norton Book of Nature Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton &

- Company, 1990.
- Finkel, Don. *Teaching With Your Mouth Shut*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2000.
- Hallowell, Christopher, and Walter Levy. *Listening to Earth*. New York: Pearson/ Longman, 2005.
- Hogan, Linda, "Walking." *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. p. 155-159.
- Johnson, June. *Global Issues, Local Arguments: Readings for Writing*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2007.
- Lunsford, Andrea, and Robert Connors. *The New St. Martin's Handbook*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, Press 1999.
- Ross, Carolyn. *Writing Nature: An Ecological Reader for Writers*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- Marr, David. *Extravagant Interest: Writing from Social Space*. Olympia WA: The Evergreen State College. 1982.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. New York: Penguin, 2000.
- Snyder, Gary. *The Practice of the Wild*. North Point Press, 1990.

b) Additional resources related to this curriculum project. (Available upon request.)

1. Syllabus for ENG 102/ College Writing II: St. Martins University--Special Themes in Argumentation, Research, & Writing: Sustainability and the Common Good—Local and Global Perspectives. Details assignments, readings, course expectations, and procedures.
2. Syllabus for "Transcendental Visions-Re-Imagining the American Dream (2005, 2006, 2007)," The Evergreen State College. Details assignments, readings, themes, and procedures.
3. Seminar Self-Evaluation Form
A guide for reflecting on the level of activity and contributions to the workshops.
4. Peer Editing Template
A step-by-step peer-editing workshop based on the Hogan/Thoreau workshops.
5. Essay Assignment: Writing From a Sense of Place
6. Mid-term essay questions for English 101 and 102, on Hogan and Thoreau.
7. Examples of student work
 - a) Sample Permission Form
 - b) Student Essays: Writing from a Sense of Place

St. Martin's University: English 102, Spring 2008
Melissa Bloomseth
Hirotsugu Kawai
Chase Mitchel

Paul St. Marie

The Evergreen State College: Transcendental Visions, Spring 2006.

Taylor Pittman

Blake Ingram

8. See also activities by: Don Foran, Nancy Paugh, Charles Luckman, Robin Jeffers, and Kathryn Byrd