

Workshop 1: “Walking” with Linda Hogan¹

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

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Time: 1.5 hours, or two fifty-minute sessions

The focus of this workshop is on 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.

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Walking, I am listening in a deeper way.
--Linda Hogan, “Walking”

During this semester we have been looking at ways that writers construct arguments and try to convince their readers of a particular point of view. For example, some arguments are implicit, embedded within a narrative. Other arguments are explicitly stated, and are presented in a straightforward manner. As we have discussed, writers draw on various techniques to explore their personal experiences, or to argue for a particular point of view.

Today, we will be working with Linda Hogan’s essay, “Walking.” Keep in mind, that we will also be reading Thoreau’s essay “Walking,” so we will have a chance to compare and contrast the two works.

First, will look at the essays individually to discover the structure, style, and purpose of each work. We will examine them from a number of perspectives. Why kinds of essays are they? What is their theme or thesis? How are they different in form and style? What are they trying to communicate or convince their readers about? What kinds of arguments do they use? When and how are they written? Who is their audience?

Then we will compare the two works. How are the experiences of the two essayists different? How are they similar? How do they make their individual experience universal?

Finally, we will develop our own perspective on these works. What do they mean to us? How might we engage in reflecting on these two works, and what do we learn from them? How do they help us engage with our own

¹ I developed the following workshop for my classes at The Evergreen State College and have continued to adapt it for a variety of courses in literature, humanities, and environmental studies, including English 101 and 102 writing courses at St. Martin’s University that explore themes in sustainability and the common good from global and local perspectives. I have adapted it for class sessions last anywhere from four-hours to 50 - 90 minutes.

Students who work with me become familiar with the workshop format, and learn to take on a leadership role in the discussions.

connection to nature? Do they help us connect, as Thomas Berry² says, to nature as a “communion of subjects, not a collection of objects?” How do they inspire, challenge, or encourage us to deal with the local/global challenges that face us?

At the end of the workshop,

- 1) Put your notes in your class-materials folder for review.
- 2) Evaluate yourself, using the seminar assessment form, on how you interacted in the workshops, took notes, and expressed your ideas in small groups and to the class.

Part 1: (60 min.) READING AND DISCUSSION

Get into small groups of three or four people. Choose one person to be a time-keeper so that you move through these activities in the allotted time. Select another person to be a scribe and take notes about your discussion. We will take turns reading aloud Hogan’s essay, “Walking,” and then we will discuss various patterns in her essay. Briefly respond to the following questions.

A: Take turns reading the essay aloud (15 min.)

B: Discussion (45 min.)

- How does her essay begin?
- How does it end?
- List examples of how she/he uses descriptive language to engage the senses of her reader.
- What does Hogan believe that observers and “walkers” can learn from the natural world?
- Hogan uses synesthesia, the mixing together two or more senses, to heighten perception. Examples might be “tasting” the color blue or “hearing” bright yellow. Hogan frequently uses metaphors or descriptive language to mix the senses. She says, “I could almost hear the redwoods beating.” In discussing the sunflower she says, “Sometimes I hear it talking. The light of the sunflower was one language, but there are others more audible.” Can you find other examples?
- Hogan describes herself as an outsider or observer. She says, “I never learned the sunflowers golden language or the tongues of its citizens.” How does she believe that those within the sunflower’s world communicate and what does this exemplify for Hogan?
- Why is Hogan’s essay entitled “Walking”? Discuss several different ways that walking is a meaningful activity in this essay. Who or what is “walking?”

² Students were familiar with Thomas Berry’s work in the following sources.
-Berry, Thomas. “Economics: It’s Effects on the Life Systems of the World.” *Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology*. Ed. Lonergan and Caroline Richards. Connecticut: Twenty-Third Productions, 1987. 5-27.
-*Thomas Berry: The Great Story*. Dir. Nancy Stetson and Penny Morell. Bullfrog Films, 2003.

- Why does Hogan personify the sunflower as a “traveler, a settler, like a dream beginning in conflict?”
- What kind of conflict or juxtaposition does she create in her essay?

Theme and Thesis:

- This is an essay, so where is the thesis? Because Hogan is in part telling a story, as well as making a statement, her thesis is not in the first paragraph. When do you begin to understand what her essay is about?
- What is Hogan’s theme and how does she develop it?
- What kind of argument do you think she presents to her readers?
- How does she explore the concept of what is nature? What is wild? How does her essay explore the relationship between “culture” and “nature”?
- How does Hogan explore the relationship between various “others”? For example, what are the relationships between: nature, self, family, culture, etc. What other relationships does she set up?

Descriptive Language, writing style:

- What is the role of the sunflower in the story? How might this function as a symbol to communicate a deeper meaning?
- Can you find other examples of symbols or symbolism? What meanings to you draw from them?
- How does Hogan include her reader in her message? What is it about Hogan’s style that allows her to draw her reader into her point of view?
- Where does she give detailed descriptions, make universal summary statements, or tell a story of personal experience?
- What are some of the other narrative techniques that Hogan uses? How many different techniques you can list? For example, see if you can find examples of dialogue, metaphor, image, repetition, questions, answers, quotes, a variety of sentence types (i.e. short, terse sentences, simple, compound or complex sentences, etc.) Give an example for each technique you find.

What is the inner and outer story?

- How does Hogan set up a scene with descriptive language, using details of sight, smell, sound, and taste? How does she use description to set up the outer events of activity—doing and being?
- How does Hogan move into inner reflection, assessment, and evaluation? How does she draw conclusions, give meaning to, and make sense of things? What are her “overall” conclusions?
- How does Hogan weave various elements together, i.e.: the inner and outer story, the panorama and the scene, the personal story, specific details, and universal insights, different times or sequences? What are the patterns in how she weaves these elements together?

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Conclusion:

Return to the large group and take turns reporting on what you discovered from/about Hogan's essay.