

**Workshop 3: Writing & Walking, Pilgrimage & Process--  
Exploring Inner & Outer Narratives<sup>1</sup>**

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

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Time: Five one-hour sessions, outside of class. This activity can also be adapted for use in a writing-retreat format, where you have open-spaces for walking near campus.

*The focus of this workshop is to engage students in an active practice of writing and walking. As they reflect on the historic role of walking and pilgrimage and how it develops human awareness, they will develop an awareness of inner and outer narratives, the ability to evoke the senses with descriptive language, and will make connections between past, present, and future contexts. Students will also be encouraged to think about how technology shapes their experience and awareness of places and spaces, language and communication. This activity must be done in five, one-hour blocks of time, and can continue for up to five weeks. The narratives that students create can be developed into personal essays or other writings.*

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**I. Overview:**

What is “walking” about, and how might this act shape awareness and refine the senses? This activity is an opportunity to develop a regular practice of walking and writing in order to develop a sense of personal identity, community affiliation, and sense of belonging as you explore various places, spaces, and experiences that are “off the grid” and outside of the marketing landscape. You will walk without cell phones, ipods, or conversation. Just allow yourself to be alone in a specific place, watching, learning, and experiencing it. As you walk, you will reflect on your inner thoughts and outer experiences, and construct your own story or narrative. When you return, you will compose a piece of writing—first journaling for yourself. Then you will give an oral account to your “walking” group in weekly meetings. Finally, you will use this material to develop an essay or prepare a “sense of place” essay that you will post online and share with others. As you work, you will explore how private space moves to public space. How might your private space be invaded by or integrated into public space? What changes as you move from walking into writing, and from private thoughts to public reflections?

Think about this assignment as “walking a beat.” You’re not just going to observe and report on it analytically. Of course, you will do that too, but you are to walk and experience it. Develop layers of associations, layers of recognition and awareness, combined with layers of your thoughts and reflections. Through a regular practice of walking, you will lay down maps of associations. This process functions like describing the weather, what things change? What remain constant?

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<sup>1</sup> Before doing this activity, have students read and discuss Thoreau and Hogan’s essays, “Walking.” Then review the discussion and series of questions from “Writing and Walking, Pilgrimage and Process: Working with the Essays of Linda Hogan and Henry David Thoreau,” on pages 5-6. See in particular, Part 3, Actual learning activities: Walking as an act of human perception and creativity; Walking as an act of conscience and communion; Walking and writing and as ways to shape meaning.

## II. CHOOSING A PLACE:

What areas interest you, urban or rural, community based or natural? What is it like to discover a place, to know a place, and to inhabit a place? Are there features that you like, don't like, or that don't matter? As you walk, you will also observe the story in your mind. What are you experiencing? What are you learning?

- ❖ Move into a sense of walking as a “happening,” a physical activity. This is not jogging, running, or physical fitness, but it might include that sense of wellbeing or being active. You will be physically engaged for a period of time.
- ❖ Choose a place that you can get to easily and return to regularly so that you have an aspect of regularity and comparison.
- ❖ Make sure that you are totally absorbed in walking; you're not sitting, drinking tea, or anything else. Remember, it's the process, not the destination.
- ❖ If you are going to an isolated place, you may want to partner with someone, take a friend, or bring a pet. However, make sure that there is no talking. You can be with another individual, but remain in your own “worlds” of thought and awareness.
- ❖ The discipline of the walker and writer is to maintain your awareness of this experience, your inner thoughts, and your outer observations. However, you can't stop to write during the physical activity. Observe your thoughts and focus on important details so that you can return and write about them later.
- ❖ How do you picture a place in your mind? What is it like to walk and take pictures? How does your experience of a place change when you have a camera? What does that mean to your sense of place?
- ❖ Do you have special health considerations such as an injury, disablement, or a special need? If so, find a place that you can get to regularly. If you are not able to “walk,” complete all of the activities by sitting and observing from a single location. Allow your senses to expand and inhabit the place. Project your awareness into the environment with an active awareness.

### Possible destinations

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|------------------------|-------------------|---|
| ❖ Parks                | ❖ Museums         | ❖ Malls (as either a destination or an distraction?)              |
| ❖ Lakes                | ❖ Nature Reserves | ❖ Sightseeing destinations around Olympia, Tumwater, Tacoma, etc. |
| ❖ Downtown             | ❖ Baseball fields |   |
| ❖ Campus               | ❖ Golf courses    |   |
| ❖ Beaches              | ❖ Riding stables  |   |
| ❖ Priest Point         | ❖ Beaches         |   |
| ❖ Neighborhoods        | ❖ Rural routes    |   |
| ❖ Hiking forest trails | ❖ Farms           |   |

## III. Keeping A Journal:

Journals and biographical writings that tell the detailed stories of people's lives and observations, and are the foundation of great science, history, and literature. There are a number of ways to keep a journal of thoughts and reflections. There are scientific journals and

observations, almanacs and records of seasonal events, personal musings and reflections, visual images and drawings, psychological stream of consciousness and dream journals, and diaries. Lewis and Clark kept detailed journals of their travels. Thoreau kept detailed journals of his observations and experiences at Walden Pond as well as other experiences throughout his life. Terry Tempest Williams, Annie Dillard, and many of the other authors that we are reading keep meticulous journals of their observations and reflections. Authors such as Dorris Lessing in *The Golden Notebook*, have built novels on concepts of journaling.

Many visual artists, naturalists, and psychologists have developed ways of keeping inviting, accessible journals. There are refined methods, such as the Grinnell method of keeping a meticulous scientific field journal, or Julia Cameron's, *The Artist's Way*, of working with creative insight, that demand great discipline and practice to maintain. Blogs are our contemporary way of keeping people informed and aware of important people, places and events.

We will discuss several ways of keeping a journal which you can use as a tool to focus your attention and record your ideas and observations. However, you are free to experiment with your own style and methods. If you are not already keeping a journal, you should consider using this workshop to develop a life-long practice of journaling or blogging.

### **Keeping Your Journal:**

You have the option of keeping a hand-written journal in a notebook. You may treat it as a natural history journal with detailed observations, or as a place for reflections, illustrations or creative notes to describe your experience. However, you may also want to keep your notes on a computer and incorporate them into a Wiki or a Blog along with your research notes. The point is to reflect on how your sense of self and identity keeps deepening as you begin to know a place better. How does this experience connect you to places that you have known in the past?

How does your awareness keep expanding as you reflect from different points of view? What are the inner and outer stories (inner thoughts, sensations, perceptions, or outer events) that are going on in your mind or in the outside world when you are walking? How do these stories shift when you are writing in a hand-written journal? What happens if you begin blogging on a computer to a public audience? What happens to your senses when you go from the experience of "walking" itself, to "writing" and reflecting on it? What happens to your inner and outer stories when you describe events, or reflect upon their meaning?

What happens when you take your personal reflections and make them public? As you create reflections about self and identity that you will share with different levels of "audience," how does your local sense of place expand to "sharing" with a larger global community? How do you think your ideas will shift and change as you begin to develop your "Sense of Place" essay?

### **IV. Guidelines for Walking and Writing--Process and Practice:**

-You will need to schedule **five** one-hour sessions in when you walk for 30 minutes and write for 30 minutes.

Questions and activities to consider as you walk include:

- ❖ How will you say hello to the space? How will you say good-by to the space?
- ❖ Each time you go, repeat, and respond to a standard question (see ideas, below.) Use repetition as a baseline for your observations. How does this place change each time you go to it? Treat walking like a meditation, or like any repetitive practice that increases your skillfulness, such as throwing a baseball or practicing an instrument.

- ❖ Each week, at the end of class, you will meet with your “walking” and research group to share your journal notes, reflections, and research about this place. Those that choose to, can post their notes on our class wiki or blog.
- ❖ Print the following activities out and take them with you each time you walk. You might want to cut them out and post them on an index card to carry with you.

### A. Option One:

#### DAY ONE:

Consider all these questions, and then ask yourself more:

- ❖ What are you thinking about as you are walking?
- ❖ What are you observing as you are walking?
- ❖ Watch your breath. Are you breathing shallowly, deeply, fast, slow? What does this tell you?
- ❖ What creatures, plants, or natural elements draw your attention or “speak” to you?
- ❖ Follow the awareness of each of your senses:
  - what do you see?
  - what do you hear?
  - what do you touch?
  - what do you smell?
  - what do you taste? (See if you can taste the “green” on your tongue.)
- ❖ What is this place like?
- ❖ What analogies, metaphors, and descriptive language can use to describe your experience?

#### DAY TWO:

Consider all the questions and activities from day one, and then ask yourself more:

- ❖ What was this place like in the past?
- ❖ Imagine it, describe it, what is it’s story?
- ❖ How does it compare to your experiences of ideas of another place from your past?
- ❖ Have a conversation with the spirit of this place, or some aspect of this place. Dialogue and questions you might ask are:
  - How is this place changing?
  - How is it different through time?
  - How was it before?
  - How is it now?
  - How is it different from the last time you walked here?
  - How is it the same?
  - What do you notice this time?
  - What are you thinking about?

**DAY THREE:**

Consider all the questions and activities from day one, and then ask yourself more:

- ❖ How is this place different from the last time you walked here?
- ❖ How is it the same?
- ❖ What do you notice this time?
- ❖ What are you thinking about?

**DAY FOUR:**

Consider all the questions and activities from day one, and then ask yourself more:

- ❖ What might this place be like in the future?
- ❖ Imagine it, describe it, what is its story?
- ❖ How does it compare to your ideas of where you'd like to be in your future?

**DAY FIVE:**

Consider all the questions and activities from day one, and then ask yourself more:

- ❖ How is this place different from the other times you walked here?
- ❖ How is it the same?
- ❖ What do you notice this time?
- ❖ What are you thinking about?

**B. Option Two:** Each day you walk through the space of the place you've chosen, focus on one of the different senses.

- DAY ONE: walking and seeing.
- DAY TWO: walking and hearing.
- DAY THREE: walking and touching.
- DAY FOUR: walking and smelling.
- DAY FIVE: walking and tasting.

**V. Final Assignments:**

**Personal Essay:** You will develop your journal notes and in-class writings into a "sense of place" essay. Combining everything that you have learned and experiences from this place, write about a place that is important to you. For details, review **Assignment Sheet One: Writing From A Sense of Place**.

**Research Paper:** You will need to do research and learn one or two things about your place, neighborhood, bio-region, etc. before you go on each walk. You will share these notes with your "walking group" each week. For more details see:

- 1) **Library scavenger hunt and bio-regional literacy quiz;**
- 2) **Assignment Sheet Two: Bibliography;** and
- 3) **Assignment Sheet Three: Local Research Paper.**

**VI. Evaluating these Writing Assignments.**

Included as an appendices are a rubric and writing sheet.