

Meeting Modern Problems - "Where is Your Walden?," Grades 9-12
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Objectives:

1. Gain an appreciation and closer understanding of how the local environment nurtures us.
2. Hone observational skills through the practice of "intentional observation".
3. Practice inquiry-based learning processes.

Materials needed:

1. 4 strips of black construction paper (2"x6")
2. A stapler or tape
3. A spiral notebook (or a journal) and a pen or pencil

Time required:

- 2 class periods for activities
- About 20 minutes per week for homework over a 6 week period
- 2 class periods to share their mediated presentations

Activities:

1. Participants construct a "frame" using the four strips of construction paper, stapled or taped in a square leaving a 2-inch square hole in the center.
2. Gather outside the school building (preferably in a wooded or landscaped area) and find a place to sit at least 10-15' away from other participants (to discourage talking or interacting).
3. Scan their surroundings, looking through the "frame" until they find an interesting place to focus (a tree, flower, etc.).
4. Spend 5 minutes actively observing whatever they have chosen to focus on. It is important to refrain from speaking during this observation time.
5. Write down four things they observe and three questions they have about what they see
E.g., I chose to observe this oak tree.
Observances
 - some of the leaves are red, some are yellow and some are green
 - the bark of the tree is very rough and scaly
 - there are some acorns on the ground surrounding the tree
 - the grass around the tree is thinner than it is away from the treeQuestions
 - Why are the leaves different colors?
 - Does the foliage prevent sun from reaching the grass below the tree?
 - How old is this tree?
6. Gather back in the classroom to share and discuss their observances.

7. Choose one of their questions and share it with the class. Rather than answering questions, the facilitator will ask participants where they might find the information leading to the answers for their questions.
8. Participants will seek their answers and list their information and the sources they used in their journals.

Follow up activities:

1. Read Henry David Thoreau's essay – "A Winter Walk" <https://www.thoreau-online.org/a-winter-walk.html>
2. Participants will find a distinct place in the community (preferably near their home) and claim it as their own "Walden." They will re-enact the same process of intentional observing (on their own) as before and write their observations/questions in their journals. They will also take a photo of their chosen place, noting the time of day and date.
3. Participants visit their distinct "Walden"-place once a week for six weeks and record changes they observe and take a photo each time.
4. At the end of the six weeks, participants assemble their writings and photos into a mediated presentation, with a concluding essay or poem of what this place and experience meant for them, and then share the mediated presentation with their peers.