

The Peace of Wild Things: Lessons from the Earth

A concept-based, multi-genre unit designed for Grades 10-12

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

— Wendell Berry, *"The Peace of Wild Things"*

This sanctuary knows its place.
It has so for a million years,
its grasses the original transcriptions
of how stems whisper winds.

And no one interprets this river
better than the cranes,
each one a long gray syllable
in the book of love.

This sanctuary says, *Come in.*
Wash your faces in the wind,
Co-create wonder with your eyes,
Treat your soles to something

Other than cement. It says,
Worship is a natural event.
It's here you justify your lives.

— Don Welch, *"Rowe Sanctuary"*

Introduction

In poetry, in fiction and essays, writers have celebrated—and continue to celebrate—the beauty and power of the natural world. Some find nature to be a superior companion to humans. Some invite their fellow men and women to share the sanctuary and spirit of living things. And some fight to preserve and protect the wild wherever it may be found.

In this unit, you will explore the natural world through the eyes of poets, short story writers, novelists, and essayists. The natural world beckons to a world in which so many inhabitants live indoors connected to the outside world largely through technology. It offers firsthand lessons in life. And regardless of where you live, you have only to step out your door to learn.

<p style="text-align: center;">Big Ideas Students will understand that:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Compelling Questions</p>
<p>For many, nature is often the best teacher, offering lessons in life, death, truth, and beauty.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the types of lessons that people may learn from the natural world? 2. Do all people seek to learn from nature? Why? Why not? 3. Have some of these lessons that people have learned from the natural world endured? Why? 4. Are these lessons universal? If so, how?
<p>Those who write about the natural world often <i>show</i> much more than they <i>tell</i>; they allow their imagery to reveal their intended meaning.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do writers mean when they <i>show</i> instead of <i>tell</i>? 2. How do writers often reveal their intended meaning through imagery or showing? 3. What does good imagery/showing look like?
<p>Those who find joy and refuge in the natural world may discover themselves as they learn about the plants, animals, birds, and fish around them.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How might people learn as much about themselves as the plants, animals, birds, and fish they are studying and enjoying? 2. Why do some people learn deeper, more lasting lessons from the natural world than from anything or any place else? 3. How does the natural world become a refuge for some people?
<p>Some claim that they draw their greatest strength and peace from their relationship with the natural world.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do people draw strength and peace from the natural world? Does this look the same for all people? 2. Some may argue that retreating to or taking refuge in nature is a means of escaping the “real world”. How do those who find strength and peace in nature respond to claims like this?
<p>Some argue that protecting and preserving the wilderness is not only an ecological necessity but a spiritual one.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the arguments of those who seek to ecologically preserve and protect the wilderness? 2. What are the arguments of those who believe that developing the wilderness is often necessary? 3. Why are the arguments on both sides of this issue often so passionate? Why do some argue that protecting and preserving the wilderness is spiritually essential? Is this argument as compelling as the ecological ones? Why? Why not?

Unit Skills

Students will be able to:

1. Comprehend and appreciate poetry, fiction, and nonfiction as a means of exploring *big ideas* about themselves and the natural world they live in
2. Identify and explain how nature writers often show more than they tell
3. Write reflectively in response to thematically-selected poetry, fiction, and nonfiction
4. Write creatively using mentor texts

Formative Assessments

1. Students will identify examples of showing (imagery). They will explain why these examples show, rather than tell, and how they reveal the writer's intended meaning.
2. Students will use what they have learned through readings and class discussions to draft a paragraph in which they respond to a writing prompt.
3. Students will use what they have learned about writing strong thesis statements to identify the strongest thesis example and justify why it is stronger than others.
4. Students will draft a thesis statement for their own reflective essay.
5. Students will draft an introductory paragraph for their reflective essay. They will use what they have learned about effective "hooks" and strong thesis statements to develop their introductions.
6. Students will draft their own poem about the natural world.
7. Students will use a scoring guide to help them revise their poem.

Summative Assessments

1. In response to an essential question, students will draft, revise, and publish a **reflective essay** in which they cite personal and text evidence.
 - A. Students will draft, revise, and publish an introduction that includes a relevant "hook" and clear reflective thesis statement.
 - B. Students will draft, revise, and publish body paragraphs that include strong, relevant text and personal evidence, as well as clear, complete explanation of that evidence.
 - C. Students will draft, revise, and publish a conclusion that includes a clear restatement of the thesis statement, as well as further considerations concerning the writer's key ideas.
2. *Optional: Using a mentor text(s), students will draft, revise, and publish an original poem.*
 - A. *Students will select and carefully consider a mentor poem(s), paying particular attention to the poet's craft.*
 - B. *Students will draft their own poem, using what they have learned from their mentor poem(s).*
 - C. *Students will revise their own poem, using teacher and peer feedback, as well as the scoring guide.*
 - D. *Students will submit—or publish—their revised poem.*

Nebraska ELA Standards *(the standards for grades 9-12 are the same)*

LA 10.1.6.c/LA 12.1.6.c Analyze the function and critique the effects of the author's use of literary devices (e.g., simile, metaphor, personification, idiom, oxymoron, hyperbole, alliteration, onomatopoeia, analogy, dialect, tone, mood).

LA 10.1.6.f/LA 12.1.6.f Interpret and evaluate information from print and digital text features to support comprehension.

LA 10.1.6.i/LA 12.1.6.i Construct and/or answer literal, inferential, critical, and interpretive questions, analyzing and synthesizing evidence from the text and additional sources to support answers.

LA 10.1.6.k/LA 12.1.6.k Select text for a particular purpose (e.g., answer a question, solve problems, enjoy, form an opinion, understand a specific viewpoint, predict outcomes, discover models for own writing, accomplish a task), citing evidence to support analysis, reflection, or research.

LA 10.1.6.n/LA 12.1.6.n Formulate and justify inferences with text evidence while previewing, reading, and analyzing literary and informational text in various formats.

LA 10.1.6.o/LA 12.1.6.o Demonstrate an understanding of complex text by using textual evidence to support analysis, reflection, and research via multiple mediums (e.g., writing, artistic representation, video, other media).

LA 10.2.1.a/LA 12.2.1.a Use multiple writing strategies recursively to investigate and generate ideas, organize information, guide writing, answer questions, and synthesize information.

LA 10.2.1.b/LA 12.2.1.b Generate a draft that conveys complex ideas and critical thinking through analysis, reflection, and use of effective organizational patterns that are appropriate to the purpose and intended audience.

LA 10.2.1.c/LA 12.2.1.c Gather and use relevant information and evidence from multiple authoritative print and/or digital sources including primary and secondary sources to support claims or theses.

LA 10.2.1.d/LA 12.2.1.d Apply standard rules of grammar and paragraph formation, including parallel structure and subordination.

LA 10.2.1.e/LA 12.2.1.e Revise to improve and clarify writing through self-monitoring strategies and feedback from others.

LA 10.2.1.h/LA 12.2.1.h Proofread and edit writing recursively for format and conventions of standard English (e.g., spelling, capitalization, grammar, punctuation, syntax, semantics).

LA 10.2.1.i/LA 12.2.1.i Display academic honesty and integrity by avoiding plagiarism and/or overreliance on any one source and by following a standard format for citation.

LA 10.2.2.a/LA 12.2.2.a Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, argumentative, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.

LA 10.2.2.b/LA 12.2.2.b Provide evidence from literary or informational text to support analysis, reflection, and research.

LA 10.2.2.c/LA 12.2.2.c Conduct and publish both short and sustained research projects to answer questions or solve problems using multiple primary and/or secondary sources to support theses.

LA 10.2.2.e/LA 12.2.2.e Analyze various mentor texts and/or exemplars in order to create a similar piece.

Unit Resources: *some suggested anchor texts*

Short fiction

“Big Two-Hearted River, Parts I and II” Ernest Hemingway

“The Bear” William Faulkner

“The Law of Life”, “To Build a Fire” (or another short story/novel excerpt) Jack London

Poetry

“The Reaches of the Platte River” Don Welch

“The River” Don Welch

“The River as a Figure of Love” Don Welch

“At the Road’s Edge” Don Welch

“Zorn” Don Welch

“The Coneflower” Don Welch

“An Acre of Butterflies” Don Welch

“Rowe Sanctuary” Don Welch

“Looking for Gold” William Stafford

“Chicory” William Stafford

“Walking with Your Eyes Shut” William Stafford

“Queen Anne’s Lace” William Carlos Williams

“The Locust Tree in Flower” William Carlos Williams

“A Blessing” James Wright, “A Lesson From James Wright” Mary Oliver, and “Two Horses” Don Welch

“Wild Geese” Mary Oliver

“Life Story” Mary Oliver

“How I Go to the Woods” Mary Oliver

“Praying” Mary Oliver

“Birches” Robert Frost

“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” Robert Frost

“The Peace of Wild Things” Wendell Berry

“Root Cellar” Theodore Roethke

Photography/Video Suggestions

On Ancient Wing

The Sandhill Cranes of North America

Michael Forsberg

Sandhill Migration, Through a Photographer's Eyes

Perry Stoner, NET News

<http://netnebraska.org/article/news/sandhill-crane-migration-through-photographers-eyes>

Platte Basin Timelapse

<http://plattebasintimelapse.com/about/>

Platte Basin Timelapse

Don Welch: Nebraska Poet

<http://plattebasintimelapse.com/2015/08/don-welch-nebraska-poet/>

Voices of the Platte: Don Welch

<http://netnebraska.org/interactive-multimedia/radio/voices-platte-don-welch>

Nebraska's Great Sandhill Crane Migration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvC6xsacncA>

Nonfiction Selections

Moving Slowly to Capture the Swift Fox

Coburn Dukeheart

National Geographic Sept. 26, 2014

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/proof/2014/09/26/michael-forsberg-moving-slowly-to-capture-the-swift-fox/>

500,000 Cranes Are Headed for Nebraska in One of Earth's Greatest Migrations

Alex Shoumatoff

Smithsonian Magazine March 2014

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/500000-cranes-are-headed-nebraska-one-earths-greatest-migrations-180949816/>

This is What One of the Last Great Migrations Looks Like

Elaina Zachos

National Geographic April 16, 2018

<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2018/04/sandill-cranes-migration-nebraska-animals-spd/>

Ecology Without Wilderness: Tending the Global Garden We Call 'Nature'

Emma Marris

The Atlantic Sept. 15, 2011

[HTTPS://WWW.THEATLANTIC.COM/TECHNOLOGY/ARCHIVE/2011/09/ECOLOGY-WITHOUT-WILDERNESS-TENDING-THE-GLOBAL-GARDEN-WE-CALL-NATURE/245170/](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/09/ecology-without-wilderness-tending-the-global-garden-we-call-nature/245170/)

March magic: Nebraska's sandhill crane migration gives new meaning to 'flyover country'

Beth J. Harpaz

Chicago Tribune Feb. 8, 2019

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/travel/sc-trav-nebraska-crane-migration-0205-story.html>