

## The Peace of Wild Things: Lessons from the Earth

A concept-based, multi-genre unit designed for upper elementary/middle school

### Cardinal

A cardinal in the snow  
is one of the few things  
to recommend itself  
without metaphor.

--Don Welch

### To Find Me

To find me  
Go to the park  
With a bag of popcorn.

I'll be one of the pigeons.

--Don Welch

## 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.

### Unit Concepts

Nature/natural world	Imagery (showing)
Lessons	Telling
Beauty	Meaning/message
Truth	Relationships
Wisdom	Joy
Life/death	Peace
Wilderness	Environment
Protection	Preservation
Strength	Wellbeing

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Big Ideas</b> Students will understand that:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Compelling Questions</b></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"> <li>1. What are the types of lessons that people may learn from the natural world?</li> <li>2. Do all people seek to learn from nature? Why? Why not?</li> <li>3. How have some of these lessons that people have learned from the natural world endured?</li> <li>4. Are these lessons universal? If so, how?</li> </ol>
<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"> <li>1. What do writers mean when they <i>show</i> instead of <i>tell</i>?</li> <li>2. How do writers often reveal their intended meaning through imagery or showing?</li> <li>3. What does good imagery/showing look like?</li> </ol>
<p>Some people claim that their relationship with the natural world gives them joy, peace, and strength.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do people find joy in their relationship with nature? What about the natural world makes some people so happy?</li> <li>2. How do people draw strength and peace from the natural world? Does this look the same for all people?</li> <li>3. How do people express the joy and peace they experience in nature? Why is it important that they share their feelings and insights about the natural world with others?</li> </ol>
<p>Some people argue that protecting and preserving the wilderness is not only important for our environment but also for our emotional and spiritual wellbeing.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why do some people argue that we must protect the wilderness we have if we are to preserve our environment?</li> <li>2. What are some ways that we have protected and continue to protect the world's wilderness?</li> <li>3. Why is protecting and preserving wilderness areas also important for our emotional and spiritual wellbeing?</li> </ol>

## 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.

## Unit 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 theses 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 own reflective essay.
6. *Optional: Students will draft their own poem about the natural world.*
7. *Optional: Students will use peer/teacher feedback and a scoring guide to help them revise their poem.*

## Unit 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 unit poetry as mentor texts, students will write an **original poem(s)** about the natural world in which they demonstrate their understanding of the role of imagery.*
  - A. *Students will draft, revise, and publish an original poem using a selected unit poem(s) as a mentor text.*
  - B. *Students will include imagery that helps readers uncover their intended meaning.*



## **Nebraska ELA Standards**

**LA 5.1.6** Comprehension: Students will construct meaning by using prior knowledge and text information while reading grade-level literary and informational text.

**LA 5.1.6.a** Examine text to determine author's purpose(s) and describe how author's perspective (e.g., beliefs, assumptions, biases) influences text.

**LA 5.1.6.b** Analyze and describe elements of literary text (e.g., characters, setting, plot, point of view, theme).

**LA 5.1.6.c** Identify and explain why authors use literary devices (e.g., simile, metaphor, alliteration, onomatopoeia, imagery, rhythm, personification, hyperbole, idioms).

**LA 5.1.6.d** Summarize and analyze a literary text and/or media, using key details to explain the theme.

**LA 5.1.6.f** Use text features to locate information and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of print and digital text.

**LA 5.1.6.i** Construct and/or answer literal, inferential, and critical questions and support answers with explicit evidence from the text or additional sources.

**LA 5.1.6.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 5.1.6.l** Build background knowledge and activate prior knowledge to identify text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections before, during, and after reading.

**LA 5.1.6.m** Self-monitor comprehension by recognizing when meaning is disrupted and apply strategies to clarify, confirm, or correct.

**LA 5.1.6.n** Make and confirm/modify predictions and inferences with text evidence while previewing and reading literary, informational, digital text, and/or media.

**LA 5.1.6.o** Demonstrate an understanding of text via multiple mediums (e.g., writing, artistic representation, video, other media).

**LA 5.2.1.a** Use prewriting activities and inquiry tools to generate ideas, organize information, guide writing, and answer questions.

**LA 5.2.1.b** Generate a draft that develops a clear topic suited to the purpose and intended audience and organizational pattern, including a strong thesis, body, conclusion, and appropriate transitions linked to the purpose of the composition.

**LA 5.2.1.c** Gather and use relevant information and evidence from multiple authoritative print and/or digital sources to support claims or theses.

**LA 5.2.1.d** Compose paragraphs with grammatically correct simple, compound, and complex sentences of varying length, complexity, and type.

**LA 5.2.1.e** Revise to improve and clarify writing through self-monitoring strategies and feedback from others.

**LA 5.2.1.h** Proofread and edit writing recursively for format and conventions of standard English (e.g., spelling, capitalization, grammar, punctuation, syntax, semantics).

**LA 5.2.2.a** Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.

**LA 5.2.2.b** Provide evidence from literary or informational text to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**LA 5.2.2.d** Use precise word choice and domain-specific vocabulary to write in a variety of modes.

**LA 5.2.2.e** Compare various mentor texts and/or exemplars to create a similar piece.

**LA 5.4.1.b** Demonstrate ethical use of information and copyright guidelines by appropriately quoting or paraphrasing from a text and citing the source using available resources (e.g., online citation tools).

## Unit Resources

### Short fiction Suggestions

- "Big Two-Hearted River, Parts I and II" Ernest Hemingway
- "The Bear" William Faulkner
- "The Law of Life" Jack London
- "The Night Came Slowly" Kate Chopin

### Poetry Selections

- "The Reaches of the Platte River" Don Welch
- "The River" Don Welch
- "The River as a Figure of Love" Don Welch
- "The Tale of Water" Don Welch
- "Barn Owl" Don Welch
- "At the Road's Edge" Don Welch
- "Zorn" Don Welch
- "The Coneflower" Don Welch
- "After Haying" Don Welch
- "In Turner's Field" Don Welch
- "Rowe Sanctuary" Don Welch
  
- "Looking for Gold" William Stafford
- "Chicory" William Stafford
- "Walking with Your Eyes Shut" William Stafford
- "Starting with Little Things" William Stafford
  
- "Queen Anne's Lace" William Carlos Williams
- "The Locust Tree in Flower" William Carlos Williams
  
- "A Blessing" James Wright and "A Lesson From James Wright" Mary Oliver
- "Wild Geese" Mary Oliver
- "Life Story" Mary Oliver
- "How I Go to the Woods" Mary Oliver
- "With Thanks to the Field Sparrow Whose Voice is so Delicate and Humble" Mary Oliver
- "The Other Kingdoms" Mary Oliver
- "When I Am Among the Trees" Mary Oliver
- "Praying" Mary Oliver
- "How Would You Live Then?" Mary Oliver
- "White Flowers" Mary Oliver
- "Five A.M. in the Pine Woods" Mary Oliver
- "Skunk Cabbage" Mary Oliver
- "Going to Walden" Mary Oliver
- "Morning in a New Land" Mary Oliver
  
- "Birches" Robert Frost
- "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" Robert Frost
  
- "The Peace of Wild Things" Wendell Berry

## **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>