Text and Context: Engaging Thoreau’s *Walden, or Life in the Woods*

**Program:** Grade Range: Undergraduate  
**Subject:** Criticism of American Literature  
**Topic:** Researching and Writing on Thoreau’s *Walden, or Life in the Woods*  
**Profile:** Professional Preparation  
**Duration:** Six weeks  
**Purpose:** To ensure that undergraduates students can identify, comprehend, interpret, analyze, critique and write about not only the literary text but the context in which the literature was written and to position their own interpretations within the broader scholarly world of literary criticism.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**  
1. Develop a personal interpretation of Thoreau’s *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, through reading the text and keeping a journal of personal reactions to the text.  
2. Interpret and analyze primary and secondary resources related to Thoreau and *Walden* found on the Web site, *Text and Context: Engaging Thoreau’s Walden, or Life in the Woods*.  
3. Use the library’s citation and full text databases and Internet subject directories to identify, interpret and analyze additional primary and secondary resources related to the context of *Walden* in the areas of author, text, place, *The Atlantic Monthly* primary sources, and literary context.  
4. Develop and give a group presentation on *Walden* in one of the context areas of author, text, place, *The Atlantic Monthly* primary sources or literary context. Include the views of appropriate literary critical scholars in these areas.  
5. Contextualize in an essay one’s personal interpretation of *Walden* with the group’s analysis of primary and secondary sources in a context area.

**Standards:**

National Educational Technology (NETS) Standards for Teachers  
I. TECHNOLOGY OPERATIONS AND CONCEPTS  
*Teachers demonstrate a sound understanding of technology operations and concepts.*  
*Teachers:*  
A. demonstrate introductory knowledge, skills, and understanding of concepts related to technology.  
II. PLANNING AND DESIGNING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND EXPERIENCES  
*Teachers plan and design effective learning environments and experiences supported by technology.*  
*Teachers:*
A. design developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that apply technology-enhanced instructional strategies to support the diverse needs of learners.

E. plan strategies to manage student learning in a technology-enhanced environment.

III. TEACHING, LEARNING AND THE CURRICULUM

Teachers implement curriculum plans that include methods and strategies for applying technology to maximize student learning. Teachers:

B. use technology to support learner-centered strategies that address the diverse needs of students.

C. apply technology to develop students’ higher-order skills and creativity.

NETS English Language Arts Standards

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic) of human experience.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, and graphical).

8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, and video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Activities:

Students will:

1. read and record in a journal their own interpretations of Thoreau’s Walden, or Life in the Woods.

2. work in one of five cooperative groups to research, discuss, interpret, analyze and critique primary and secondary resources in one of the context areas: author, text, place, The Atlantic Monthly primary sources, and the literary context. Groups will be randomly assigned a context area.

3. examine, interpret and analyze primary and secondary sources related to Walden found on the Web site, Text and Context: Engaging Thoreau’s Walden, or Life in the Woods.

4. using the library’s citation and full text databases and the Internet, identify, interpret and analyze additional primary and secondary resources related to the context of Walden in the areas of the author, the text, the place, The Atlantic Monthly primary sources, and the literary context.

5. as part of the secondary sources, identify and analyze literary critics who address these context areas.
6. develop and give a 20-minute group presentation using PowerPoint and the Internet on the research and analysis conducted in one of the context areas.
7. contextualize their personal interpretation of *Walden* with one major conclusion of the analysis resulting from their group’s context-area presentation in a five-page essay. At least three literary critics mentioned in the presentation must be substantively included in the essay.

**Evaluation:**

Students will be evaluated on their journal entries, group presentations and final essays.

1. Journal entries will be evaluated on meaningfulness and substance of the observation, evidence of interpretation or analysis, link to a specific passage in the literary text, and written expression in concise, grammatically correct prose.

2. Group presentations will be graded on the linked rubric.

3. Essays will be evaluated on appropriateness and diversity of literary critical resources used; integration of literary critical resources into essay, use of MLA style, logic and coherence of literary critical argument in support of student’s personal interpretation, use of literary text in support of personal interpretation, and use of concise and grammatically correct prose.