

This class plan is called Sauntering, and it is an experience in slowing down, engaging the body in movement as part of an embodied pedagogy. This lesson plan also encourages the idea of making place together, by engaging in communal and everyday acts of inquiry, knowledge production, and communication. It can be adapted to a number of courses, such as an Environmental Humanities course in the core curriculum, a graduate-level Creative Writing course focused on the environment, or an upper-level Ecocriticism course.

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Sauntering

Prior to class, the Instructor collects theory passages, poems, recordings, images, items, examples pertaining to the topic of the day. Environmental topics could include plastics, animals, petrochemicals, extraction, climate change, food, natural disasters, etc. The items can be arranged around the classroom on walls and tables, or outside on a patio or green space if available. The idea is that students learn to saunter or walk through a place or space, engaging with the material without a fixed purpose, with a spirit of discovery. Then they reflect and share with one another about their own engagement with the material.

1. At the beginning of class, read this passage from Thoreau's essay "Walking" aloud to set the tone:

I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks—who had a genius, so to speak, for *sauntering*, which word is beautifully derived “from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretense of going *à la Sainte Terre*,” to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, “There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*,” a Saunterer, a Holy-Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds; but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense, such as I mean. Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre* without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. For this is the secret of successful sauntering. He who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all; but the saunterer, in the good sense, is no more vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the shortest course to the sea. But I prefer the first, which, indeed, is the most probable derivation. For every walk is a sort of crusade, preached by some Peter the Hermit in us, to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the Infidels.

It is true, we are but faint-hearted crusaders, even the walkers, nowadays, who undertake no persevering, never-ending enterprises. Our expeditions are but tours, and come round again at evening to the old hearth-side from which we set out. Half the walk is but retracing our steps. We should go on the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return,—prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only as relics to our desolate kingdoms. If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again,—if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man; then you are ready for a walk.

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking." Project Gutenberg.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1022/1022-h/1022-h.htm>

2. **Have students "saunter."** **Instructions for students:** Spend about 15 minutes sauntering through this space, taking in images, quotes, poems, etc that appeal to you. You can spend a lot of time with one item that stands out, or do a gallery tour of the whole room, taking it all in before landing somewhere. Walk through the space. Pay attention to details (the words, images, objects, etc) in the items that interest you.
3. **Free Write.** Have students settle back into their seats and write for 5-6 minutes about their experience sauntering through the space and engaging with the material. **Writing Prompt:** What did you encounter? What stood out to you or got your attention? Why? What details do you recall about the material you encountered? What resonated? What was your experience walking through the space? Why did you land where you did?
4. **Share out in groups. 15 minutes.** You can do this in pairs or groups. It is a great way to build community, but it is also interesting to hear how different people gravitate toward different objects, ideas, images, etc. Someone just walked right by one image, while another person really noticed a lot of detail about it. In this way, students hear about something they missed spending time with, so they get a wider sense of the ideas/images/literature/objects related to the topic. **Discussion Prompt:** What did you discuss in your group? What items stood out to people? Which details did you recall?
5. **Come back together, share with wider group. Wrap up. 15-20 minutes.** This can start with just sharing with a bigger group some of the ideas that circulated in the small group. Students can share their own impressions, but they can also cite their group members experiences. Instructor can start asking follow up questions such as: What is the significance about the item(s) they discussed? What further thoughts do they have about these materials? Why, for example, would a toothbrush be included in a class about animals? What is relevant to their own lives? How might a passage of ecocriticism relate to the rest of their day as they saunter out of the class? How might they take some of these ideas into their other classes? How does the process of sauntering through material differ from having the professor lecture about it, or other modes of classroom organization? What did the process feel like?

Take-Aways: When we tried this out at a conference, participants shared about experiencing the classroom anew as an event or a happening. People mentioned that in teaching, you can solicit what students see and experience about the material, as much as what you want to show them about it. One participant liked that the class gave them an opportunity to engage other senses (a bowl full of dried white navy beans, for example, invited one to experience it in a tactile manner). Some of the theory quotes we included came alive for participants, as they said in this context (experienced with others) they gained a practical social understanding of the terms or ideas, in a shared community. One participant said that the class reminded them of how far they have gotten away—in their own teaching and writing—

from the body, from curiosity, and from community. One participant shared an experience of being disturbed, in that it is unsettling to not know where you are going and what the point is. This is a de-centering experience, one that asks students to create the meaning of the class together. Recognizing that learning is not always comfortable, or that it happens in ways that one might not have expected, can provide fuel for a rich conversation about how we learn, what our process is, and what the implications might be for engaging with environmental content in ways that don't simply replicate previous models.