

Overview

Different stories about Walden are generated by drawing from different sets of cards that tell the story from different perspectives. Each hand you draw tells a new story. This is called procedural storytelling.

Materials

On the following pages, there are six categories of cards (e.g. Indigenous peoples, Industry, Thoreau, etc.). Each category has five cards.

Setup

Print and cut out all of the cards, and keep them stacked by category. Depending on the size of the class, teachers might want to print more than one copy of the whole set of cards (students can each receive a deck of cards or can work in groups with each group receiving a deck.)

Gameplay Directions

To begin, the teacher will display the following introductory sentence on a physical or digital whiteboard: **“Henry Thoreau lived in the woods on the shore of a pond named Walden, near a town called Concord, in Massachusetts.”** Next to it they will write this question: “How can we finish telling this story?”

The teacher will assemble a deck consisting of the Thoreau and European Americans cards only. They will shuffle these together and will draw five cards.

They will read out the introductory sentence on the board, and then will read out each of the five cards, as if it is part of a story.

The teacher will then distribute at least three custom decks to students. Each deck will include two categories that are a different combination than the one the teacher just read out. For example:

- Indigenous peoples and Environment
- Enslaved peoples and Industry
- Indigenous peoples and enslaved peoples
- Thoreau and Indigenous peoples
- European Americans and enslaved peoples

Students will shuffle their custom deck and draw five cards at random.

Starting with the intro sentence on the whiteboard, they will read each card out loud to a peer or group, as if it is part of a story. The teacher will prompt them to think about the ways that each of the categories is or is not reflected in their story and how the categories interrelate.

THOREAU



While he lived at the pond, Thoreau wrote a book about his life there that has inspired many others to want to live simply in nature and to care about preserving the environment.

THOREAU



Thoreau's curiosity about the world around him led him to wonder about every plant and animal, how they lived and grew, and about the other people who had lived in the woods before him.

THOREAU



Thoreau wondered in his writings about the former inhabitants of the woods, like the indigenous peoples who had lived there before the Europeans had arrived. As he walked the woods, he found artifacts of these peoples' lives – stone arrowheads, axe heads, and cooking tools.

THOREAU



The town of Concord became famous for the writers who lived there. Like Thoreau, they wrote about nature and its importance to our lives and they were called the "Transcendentalists."

THOREAU



Thoreau and the Transcendentalist writers who lived in the town loved to walk in the woods and by the pond because they wanted to experience the sublime aspects of nature.

EUROPEAN AMERICANS



Thoreau wondered why most of the people who lived in Concord did not love the woods as he did, coming only to get firewood and sometimes to fish, but never just to walk its paths and experience its beauties.

EUROPEAN AMERICANS



The town had been formed when a group of British settlers negotiated a land purchase with the remnants of the local Indigenous people. They gave them wampum, hatchets, knives and cloth and called the town "Concord" because the negotiations had been peaceful.

EUROPEAN AMERICANS



In the beginning of the town, the woods near Walden Pond were set aside as woodlots because the soil there was not very good for farming. So, the pond and the woods became the margins at the outskirts of "civilized" society.

EUROPEAN AMERICANS



Concord had not always been peaceful. At the start of the Revolutionary War, it was the site of the first armed resistance to British rule in America.

EUROPEAN AMERICANS



The highest point along the shore of Walden Pond was named Emerson's Cliff, after the town's most famous citizen and Thoreau's mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

ENVIRONMENT



Long ago, there was a glacier where Walden Woods is now. And the pond was formed when the glacier retreated, more than 14,000 years ago, leaving deep blocks of melting ice.

ENVIRONMENT



Around 12,000 years ago, the tundra around the area that is now the town of Concord changed to become a forest, with spruce, jack pine and green alder. Later came the pitch pine, the oak, the hemlock, and all the trees that Thoreau wrote about in *Walden*.

ENVIRONMENT



The forest which had formed in Concord over 10,000 years ago was cut down by the European settlers. By the time that Thoreau lived there, only ten percent of the original forest remained. The area where he lived had been replanted for firewood, but the old growth was gone.

ENVIRONMENT



Walden Pond is a deep, deep well – what is called a “kettle pond”. Some people believed it was bottomless. Thoreau knew it was not because he had measured it, but he liked the idea that the world needs to believe some ponds are bottomless because it feeds our imagination.

ENVIRONMENT



Eleven thousand years before Thoreau made his home at Walden Pond, there were already Indigenous peoples living in the area. They hunted caribou and mastodon, and they fished and foraged and formed trade networks from what is now Maine to Tennessee.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



Concord had once been home to the Pennecook, an Indigenous people who were decimated by disease that was likely brought to America by European settlers.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



The area which became the town of Concord was originally known as “Musketaquid,” the Algonquin word for “a place where the water flows through the grasses.”

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



During the conflict known as King Phillip’s War, which was an effort by the Indigenous peoples to resist European rule in the area, there was a free fire zone in effect near Walden Pond. This meant that any Indigenous person more than one mile from home could be killed.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



Thoreau wrote about the oral history of the Indigenous people of the area, who talked about a great hill that “rose as high into the heavens as the pond now sinks deep into the earth.” This story accurately reflects the geographic formation of the pond.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



One day, when Thoreau was walking with his brother near the pond, they found an indigenous arrowhead. “Here,” he said, “stood Tahattawan; and there, is Tahattawan’s arrowhead!” Tahattawan was a famous Indigenous leader.

ENSLAVED PEOPLES



Thoreau and his family and friends were all part of the Abolitionist movement to end slavery, and the town of Concord was a stop along the Underground Railroad for enslaved people trying to escape from the South.

ENSLAVED PEOPLES



Thoreau wrote about the formerly enslaved people who had lived in the woods of Walden before him. Zilpah White, Brister Freeman, and Cato Ingraham, all built homes in the woods, outside of the main society of Concord.

ENSLAVED PEOPLES



Irish rail workers came to live in the woods while building the Fitchburg Railroad. These immigrants competed for work with formerly enslaved Black people. When the immigrants build their shanties in the woods, the Black people were forced to move to another area.

ENSLAVED PEOPLES



Near the edge of Thoreau's beanfield in the woods were the ruins of the home of a formerly enslaved person named Zilpah White. She survived by gardening, spinning linen and raising chickens. Thoreau remembered her strong voice singing as she worked, and it echoed through the woods.

ENSLAVED PEOPLES



There is a hill named after Brister Freeman in Concord today – Brister's Hill. Even though his former master was a well-known man in his time, it is Brister's name that remains as part of the current geography of Concord.

INDUSTRY



The European settlers of Concord discovered that they could rake up the layer of bog iron that lay under the meadows and use it for industry. Deep scars formed in the earth where the carts transported the iron to smelters.

INDUSTRY



Concord was the center of much industrial activity when Thoreau went to live in the woods. The Fitchburg Railroad connected the industrial mills to customers in the cities and the natural resources of the area were exploited.

INDUSTRY



Thoreau's family owned a pencil factory in Concord, and he worked there on and off most of his life. He even invented a better way of making pencils and applied for a patent for his invention.

INDUSTRY



Every winter, the townspeople of Concord would come down to Walden Pond to get the ice out in great blocks, which they would store, covered in sawdust and burlap, to cool their drinks in the long hot summers.

INDUSTRY



The woodchoppers could be heard throughout the woods of Walden in Thoreau's time, cutting down the forest to heat the homes of the people of Concord.