

HIGH SCHOOL | BLUE VALLEY DISTRICT NOVEL RATIONALE

***The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee**

English Language Arts, 11th Grade

WHAT'S THE STORY?

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail dramatizes the historical incident in which Henry David Thoreau, protesting the Mexican-American War of 1846-48, went to jail for refusing to pay his taxes. Lawrence and Lee's text utilizes a fluid structure, with characters and events portraying patterns around the central figure of Thoreau, in jail throughout the play. Each of the flashback scenes and those set in the jail itself reveal aspects of Thoreau's character and philosophy, constructing, by the end of the play, a composite portrait explaining his actions. Present in the play is evidence of Thoreau's theme of transcendentalism, reinforced by Thoreau's renaming of himself and his rejection of conformity.

CONNECTIONS TO CURRICULUM*

The following are some, but not all, of the connections to curriculum for this novel.

- **Unit 1: Language and Perspective**
 - Essential Questions: “How do texts reflect society both historically and linguistically?” and “How can crafting your story reflect personal identity?”
- **Unit 2: Complex Issues**
 - Essential Questions: “How does written language challenge and change an individual's mind? What role does the writer play in challenging and changing an individual's mind?”
- **Unit 3: Universal Human Experience**
 - Essential Questions: “How does sustained inquiry of the past inform and motivate change?” and “How do we prepare for an uncertain future?”

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.11.1
- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. RL.11.2
- Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama. RL.11.3
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes

- points clear, convincing, and engaging. RL.11.5
- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading. RL.11.10
 - Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. RL.11.11
 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. RL.11.4