

Documenting the Past, Imagining the Future
Tentative CHLP for the Frost Place

Bethany Taylor, June 2008

This program is for middle and high school students, with a school system that is open to interdisciplinary programs. Due to the seasonal constraints on the Frost Place, this program should be run in the early fall, as an introduction to a year of awareness of place, or as the cap to regional studies in the spring. Either way, allow enough time for two site visits, and ideally, a presentation at the site.

1.) Statement of Goal or Anticipated Outcome of Project

- a. Appreciation of the interplay between life, art, and place

2.) Central Themes/Guiding Questions/Introduction to the project

- a. NH poets...Donald Hall says that he writes about “Love, death and New Hampshire,” which opens the door to what poetry might be and mean, particularly in NH.
- b. How does R.F’s life **here** impact his poetry (barn, light farming, botany, mountains, community, family’s willingness to go along with his plot for success, children’s deaths etc.)?
- c. Presentation of texts, described below
- d. How has **here** helped to foster Frost, what parts of this community have preserved his life? (continuation of the poets, stations of the Frost, etc.)

3.) Chronology of activities to achieve the goal

- a. Discussion of Frost’s life and poetry, brief history of the preservation and salvation, and continuation of the site, threshold of change (middle/high school) period
- b. Visit to the Frost Place with time to wander the site, meet with director/poet/docent/caretakers, encourage silent reflection times, hope desperately for inspiration to strike, advise students to take notes/pictures of what interests them and what they find relevant on the site to their own lives.
- c. Individual writing of and discussion on what the place reveals of Frost, and what the students’ places reveal of them, what places reveal them and how, where are they most themselves? Is what is created out of those places/memories of those places art (yes, for these purposes)
 - i. Is the site worth preserving, to the students? To the community? Why/why not?
 - 1. What aspects are worth it, who decides?
 - 2. Authenticity, does it matter? If not, what does?
 - ii. Does seeing the place change perceptions of the man and/or his poetry?
- d. Proposals for projects, initial planning, individual discussions on where to find resources and materials.
- e. Second visit to the site for additional research/materials for presentation
 - i. Visit to the Franconia Town Hall for students who are drawn to the political/business side of managing the site/site’s history.
- f. Creation of student responses to the aspect of the Frost Place that they found most personally relevant
- g. Presentation of the responses, display or demonstrations, ideally at the Frost Place, or at the Franconia Town Hall.

4.) Description of student demonstrations of learning

- a. An articulation of the connection the students have found to Frost, or the Frost Place, in

whatever medium seems most appropriate to the student's interest; e.g. poetry, scrapbook, working demonstration of use of old tools, presentation on historic preservation, photographs, farming, woodworking, old barns and architecture, Town Hall politics and business, music (what do they imagine the piano music floating across the potato fields was) essays, etc., coupled with a representation of what on the site inspired them, (picture of the old barn, copies of poems, letters, pictures of Frost, view, etc.) *Obviously, the pieces which the students find inspiring do not necessarily have to come from the Franconia years.

5.) Method of assessment

- a. Student's ability to articulate a personal connection to some aspect, however large, small, mundane or spectacular, of Frost's life and art in this region.
- b. Honest participation in group discussions and response writings, respectful behavior on sites, initiative in engaging with resources, etc.

Not being a teacher, I have little idea of how practical or impractical this project is, and I am a bit leery, as I am sure most of us are, in how to appropriately and fairly assess a student's expression of their reaction to the Frost place or any other theme.

Texts I would use if teaching this CHLP: (there would be more, but these are the first I thought of.) I imagine that "The Same Ax Twice" would work well, but haven't read it myself I cannot say for certain how. Working in themes beyond book, music, and picture art would be necessary prior to the site visits in order to broaden the students' perceptions of what is allowable, encouraged, for the project.

By Frost himself: (certainly others at the discretion/passion of the instructors/students/season)

"The Gift Outright," *for the land and political connections.*

"The Death of the Hired Man," *sense of home, art of work*

"New Hampshire," *to celebrate here for what it is*

"Nothing Gold can Stay" *in regards to historic preservation/battle against time*

By others:

"The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams, ("so much depends/upon/a red wheel/barrow/glazed with rain/water/beside the white/chickens") *small beauty in the everyday, life=art.*

"The response we make when we "believe" a work of the imagination is that of saying: 'This is the way things are. I have always known it without being fully aware that I knew it. Now in the presence of this play or novel or poem (or picture or piece of music) I know that I know it.' It is this form of knowledge which Plato called 'recollection.'"

—Thornton Wilder, from the introduction to Three Plays. *With this piece, emphasize that it is not only traditional arts that can provide this moment of recollection, déjà vu-type learning, when something clicks within the individual.*

Stage Manager: "Most everybody's asleep in Grover's Corners. There are a few lights on: Shorty Hawkins, down at the depot, has just watched the Albany train go by. And at the livery stable somebody's setting up late and talking.—Yes, it's clearing up. There are the stars—doing their old, old crisscross journeys in the sky. Scholars haven't settled the matter yet, but they seem to think there are no living beings up there. Just chalk...or fire. Only this one is straining away, straining away all the time to make something of itself. The strain's so bad that every sixteen hours everybody lies down and gets a rest."— Thornton Wilder, Our

Town, Act Three, *after all the passion and drama of the play, the ordinary beat of life continues.*

“Well I remember the day my father and I walked up a hill road out of Franconia and came out on the Willis Herbert farm facing one of those spectacular mountain views that the White Mountains provide—this time the Lafayette Range, and my father said, ‘This is it.’

He walked across the lawn to a man digging the Spring earth and went straight to the point: ‘You wouldn’t want to sell me this place, would you?’ Well, after several more meetings and rearrangements, we owned it. We shingled, painted, built a shed at the back, a porch on the front, and settled down to keeping watch of many moons rising and falling over Lafayette.”

—Letter from Lesley Frost to Evangeline Machlin, April 20 1977 in regards to the town taking over the Frost Place. Littleton Courier p 8. *Frost’s “recollection” of that place and house being “it;” how and why a place speaks to an individual.*

“Fanfare for the Common Man,” Aaron Copland, *resonates with Frost’s paeans to normal people /making the ordinary beautiful by simply recording that it is so.*