**The History and Science of American Land Stewardship:**

**The voices of Wendell Berry, John Steinbeck, and Robinson Jeffers**

Karen L. Kinnamon, NEH Steinbeck Institute 2016

Americus Sumter High School, Americus, Georgia

**Details:** In an effort to build understanding and awareness about the issues of land stewardship and sustainable living in the 21st century, students will deeply consider Wendell Berry’s thoughts on the “Boomers” verses the “Stickers” in his 2012 NEH Jefferson Lecture. Using the concepts of “truth, nature, imagination, affection, love, hope, beauty, and joy,” Students will read the prose of The Grapes of Wrath, the poetry of Wendell Berry and Robinson Jeffers, and conduct Internet research into the history, science, and current trends of sustainable or unsustainable farming and living practices.

**Grade Level(s):** 9-12 (Especially designed for students taking American History/Government and American Literature

**Objectives:**

1. Students will recognize humans as stewards of the land
2. Students will gain poetic insight on the sanctity of the land from poems by Robinson Jeffers and Wendell Berry
3. Students will research soil ecology and the dust bowl
4. Students will connect the history of the dust bowl to its environmental and psychological impact on the land and the people using chapters 3, 5, 9, and 11 of The Grapes of Wrath
5. Students will research local, national, and international examples of poor farming practices on soil conservation.
6. Students will connect responsible land stewardship with the artistic purpose and voice of John Steinbeck, Robinson Jeffers, and Wendell Berry
7. Students will create a personal plan for sustainable living

**Overview:** In this week long set of lessons, students will come to understand man’s connection to the land and how American Agribusiness has caused poor land stewardship, thus disrupting the harmony of man’s connection to place and land. From a poetic, literary perspective to an historical and scientific approach, students will explore and investigate man’s relationship with nature, nature’s response, and how we can strive to practice more sustainable living.

**Day 1**—To introduce man’s connection to the land and to our American republic, students will read and listen to Wendell Berry’s 2012 NEH Jefferson Lecture and take guided notes (see attached resources I) (<http://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/wendell-e-berry-lecture>

**For homework**, students will read Berry’s poems “A Poem on Hope” and “The Peace of Wild Things” and Robinson Jeffers’ poems “The Beauty of Things,” “Promise of Peace,” and “Carmel Point” and evaluate them using a graphic organizer (see attached resources--II).

**Day 2**—Students will discuss the poetic voices of Wendell Berry and Robinson Jeffers’ and their views on man’s connection to the land and what role humans must take as stewards of the land. Following the discussion, students will write a brief reflection on these poets’ views. After their writing reflections, students will view historical documentary footage of the Dust Bowl from two websites and take viewing notes.

(see attached resources--III)

<http://www.history.com/topics/dust-bowl>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iS6DJo1NYFA>

**For homework**, students will read chapters 3, 5, 9, and 11 of The Grapes of Wrath (Chapters will be divided among students and peer-taught back to their classmates using a guided reading document.

(see attached resources--IV)

**Day 3**—Using guided reading documents, students will first gather in chapter assigned groups, and then representatives for each chapter will form groups to jigsaw teach and share their observations from their guided reading documents. After this exchange of information, students will discuss the economic, emotional, and psychological effects of poor land stewardship.

**For homework**, students will research some aspect of soil conservation and the dust bowl using designated websites and a guided note-taking format (see attached resources--V). Students will be assigned one of 4 tasks:

I. (Soil Conservation Service)

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/when-the-dust-settled.xml>

[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?cid=nrcs143\_021395](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?cid=nrcs143_021395" \t "_blank)

II. (Lessons from the Dust Bowl)

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4015056/>

III. (Applications of Soil Conservation)

 <http://www.scienceclarified.com/everyday/Real-Life-Earth-Science-Vol-3/Soil-Conservation-Real-life-applications.html>

IV. (Threats to and composition of soil)

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/t0389e/t0389e02.htm>

**Day 4—** Using their guided notes from their designated task, students will first gather in their designated task groups, and then representatives for each task will form groups to jigsaw teach and share their guided notes to teach their classmates. After this exchange of information, students will write about the need for soil conservation using their compiled notes. For homework, students will use two websites to individually research sustainable farming practices and sustainable living practices. They will use a guided note-taking format.

(see attached resources –VI)

<http://www.ucsusa.org/food_and_agriculture/solutions/advance-sustainable-agriculture/sustainable-agriculture.html#.V-VwjJMrIdU>

<http://www.globalstewards.org/sustainable-lifestyle.htm>

**Day 5—**To close this week of exploration into the history and science of American Land Stewardship, students will be put in groups of 3 to 4 people in order to create their own sustainable living community using the key the concepts of “truth, nature, imagination, affection, love, hope, beauty, and joy” that Wendell Berry expresses in his NEH Jefferson lecture and that they explored in The Grapes of Wrath and Jeffers’ and Berry’s poems. They will construct their community using designated guidelines to create it and then present it to the class.

(see attached resources—VII)