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Walden, a game EDU

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Title: Walden, a game EDU

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ABSTRACT

Walden, a game, EDU adapts the widely acclaimed experimental game based on Thoreau's Transcendentalist masterpiece as a set of games-based learning modules with integrated standards-based curriculum in ELA, Social Studies, Social and Emotional Learning, History, Civics, and Environmental Science. Created in collaboration with teachers, students, content advisors, games-based learning experts, and evaluators, *Walden, a game EDU* is a model for online and hybrid games-based learning experience in the humanities. This showcase of *Walden, a game EDU* will contain completely new content, gameplay, and integrated curriculum that will be fully playable at the showcase and will be the first in-person demonstration of this new educational version of the game.

Modular Game-Based Curriculum for the Humanities and Beyond

Walden, a game is a first-person exploration game about the life of American philosopher Henry David Thoreau during his experiment in self-reliant living at Walden Pond. Starting in 2020, the *Walden* team, funded by a new grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), began adapting this award-winning open-world experience into five new 15–30-minute learning modules for middle and high school students. While based on the original game, these learning modules contain new content aligned with specific multidisciplinary learning objectives. These include:

- **Self-Reliance:** Focused on English-Language Arts and Social Studies, this module allows students to explore Thoreau's central themes of self-reliance and his critique of materialism as they take on day one of his life in the woods. Accompanying curriculum includes six modular lessons that explore and engage these themes in active and project-based learning. <https://www.waldengame.com/info-selfreliance>
- **Where I Lived:** Exploring Critical Geography and Social Studies, this module challenges the students to explore the land where Thoreau lived for traces of marginalized peoples who also lived in Walden Woods, including Indigenous people, enslaved and freed Black people, immigrants, and others. Accompanying curriculum includes four modular lessons that challenge students to discover marginalized histories in their own locales through project-based learning. <https://www.waldengame.com/info-where-i-lived>
- **What I Lived For:** Exploring Social-Emotional Learning, this module challenges students to improve the abilities to self-manage and reflect by engaging with the meditative aspects of Thoreau's experience at the Pond. Accompanying curriculum includes seven modular lessons that connect mindfulness, Transcendentalism, and a relationship to nature through physical and project-based learning. <https://www.waldengame.com/info-what-i-lived-for>
- **Civil Disobedience:** This History and Civics module focuses on Thoreau's essay of the same name, exploring what it means to engage in civic action that is authentic, responsible, and informed. Accompanying curriculum includes six modular lessons that connect Thoreau's and his contemporaries' writings on abolitionism and civil disobedience to the writings of contemporary abolitionist writers and activists. <https://www.waldengame.com/civil-disobedience>

These games have been designed for low end PC/Macs and Chromebooks with the broadest possible reach in mind. The modules are in beta testing and have been played more than 30,000 times as part of our open beta process. We have worked closely with a group of 100 teachers across multiple disciplines to craft the learning objectives and new gameplay for these educational modules to make them successful in online, in-person, and hybrid classrooms. Early evaluation of these game modules points to a model in which 91% of teachers surveyed who used the new modules and curriculum rated the outcomes in their classrooms as successful or highly successful.

The GLS showcase demonstration will include playable versions of all the modules, including the brand-new *Civil Disobedience* module, which has been in high demand from teachers seeking to connect the topical themes of civic engagement and activism to Thoreau's classic essay. The curriculum will also be available to view and with the demonstrators during the showcase.

Testimonials from Teachers

We have received letters from numerous teachers that underly the importance of this project and its potential as a platform for future projects. Here are some of their responses:

“For many of my students, your game was a lifeline; for me, your game was an eye-opening demonstration of new learning possibilities.” – Amanda Potts, English teacher

“I’ve been raving about the game to anyone who will listen and want to do a longer unit with it next year.” – Marianne Kabir, 8th Grade Social Studies teacher

“My students enjoyed the experience and were chatting about what they found, did, etc. during the game. Most students played for the entire 30 minutes, then read over their journals. I’ll definitely be using “Self-Reliance” again with students.” – Denise Mixdorf, English teacher

“My students and I played the game over the last two days, and we absolutely loved it! They really enjoyed being able to play a video game in class, ha! I loved seeing them work through “Self-Reliance” and connecting Transcendentalism to a game that they were interested in.”

– Bailey Weaver, High School English Language Arts