

Who is Loren Eiseley?

Loren Eiseley was a Nebraska naturalist and philosopher who grew up in the pre-Depression years of the 1920's in Lincoln, Nebraska. In his youth, he wandered through marshes and sewers, explored sunflower forests, filled fish tanks with muck and mire from a frozen pond to see what might emerge, and played dice in an abandoned house near his home. He became fascinated by the mammoth bones he saw on a visit to the state museum, and soon set up a museum of his own discoveries. As a university student, he hunted fossils in the rich bone beds of western Nebraska and eastern Wyoming. These experiences would inspire the essays and poems that he wrote about the mysteries of nature and humankind's relationship to the natural world.

A celebrated scholar and writer, Eiseley spent most of his professional career as a Benjamin Franklin Professor of History and Science at the University of Pennsylvania. The Bloomberg Review declared, "There can be no question that Loren Eiseley maintains a place of eminence among nature writers."

Why introduce the works of Loren Eiseley to secondary students?

Secondary students should be introduced to the works of Loren Eiseley because Eiseley is an important 20th century scientific and literary figure; his emphasis on understanding and connecting with the natural world of both the present and the past is of paramount importance today; his themes, especially his ruminations on time and man's place in natural and anthropological history, are universal; his prose is an excellent resource for understanding the elements and intricacies of nonfiction literature and good writing.



Where do his works fit in the curriculum?

Although Eiseley consistently thought of himself as an outcast (" . . . I repeat I am a fugitive," he writes in the essay "The Gold Wheel". "I was born one."), Eiseley's ideas and powerful prose are a perfect fit for students of science, literature, and history, both natural and anthropological. His writing provides profound insight into the workings of the natural world and man's relationship to that world, and his unique literary style is rich ground for students of literature.

The lessons here are intended to be flexible. Every lesson description includes the state standards for Nebraska that the lesson could be aligned with.