

# Walking in the Footsteps of Loren Eiseley in "The Slit"



## **GRADE LEVEL**

Grades 9-12

## **SUBJECTS**

English, Language Arts

## **ESTIMATED TIME**

Five 50-minute sessions

*"We have joined the caravan, you might say, at a certain point; we will travel as far as we can, but we cannot in one lifetime see all that we would like to see or learn all that we hunger to know."*

## **OVERVIEW**

In his essay, "The Slit," Loren Eiseley shares with his readers some of his own musings and observations about life..."a bit of my personal universe, the universe traversed in a long and uncompleted journey." He writes: "Forward and backward I have gone, and for me it has been an immense journey." Our observations and perceptions are based on our own journeys--the places we have lived and traveled, the people we have encountered, and the culture and history that have shaped us.

In this series of lessons, students will examine the life of Loren Eiseley by figuratively walking in his footsteps. They will use materials and readings from *The Loren Eiseley Reader*, The Eiseley Society website, and other resources to identify places and events that were important influences in Eiseley's life and writing. Students will make annotated maps of different regions of Nebraska and other parts of the country that pinpoint and describe these places. They will then work in groups to develop a short narrated tour of one location using a combination of different types of media, and present their work to the class. As an enrichment activity, they will be able to make connections between Eiseley's journey and their own, as they create annotated maps of their own landmarks--places of significance to them and/or their family.

## **MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY**

- Copies of *The Loren Eiseley Reader* for all students in the class
- Computer access to the Internet, Microsoft Word, Presentation Software, and Google
- Google Gmail accounts for the instructor and all students
- Handouts: Creating and Editing Custom Maps using Google Maps; Sample custom map
- Writing journals

## **PREPARATION**

1. Read Eiseley's essay, "The Slit," and make sure there are enough copies of *The Loren Eiseley Reader* for each student (available for loan from your ESU).
2. Prepare for this unit by looking at the article, "Walking in the Footsteps of Loren Eiseley" by Brandon Nelson, found at <http://www.prairiefirenewspaper.com/2014/06/walking-in-the-footsteps-of-loren-eiseley-scientific-discoveries-in-western-nebraska>
3. Look through *The Loren Eiseley Reader* and the Eiseley Society website (<http://www.eiseley.org>) to identify some of the key places in Eiseley's life and writing--where he lived and worked, and where Eiseley went on expeditions with the Nebraska State Museum's South Party.
4. Arrange for students to have access to personal computers (with Internet) during most of the sessions of this lesson. Make sure all students have Google Gmail accounts.
5. Make copies of all handouts and have all materials available for use.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN**

### **STUDENT OBJECTIVES**

In this series of lessons, students will

- learn part of the history of Loren Eiseley's Nebraska, including some of the places he lived and wrote about;
- use the Google Maps tools and Internet sources to research and create annotated maps illustrating key locations in Nebraska relevant to Eiseley's writing and life;
- work in small groups to develop a narrated tour of one of these Nebraska locations using a combination of different types of media (YouTube videos, images, text, quotes from other sources); and
- practice oral and presentation skills in small-group discussions and by presenting their work to the class.

## SESSION ONE

1. Begin the unit by asking the class to imagine what it would be like to write about their own hometowns or neighborhoods twenty years from now. What images, places or key events would be most important? Briefly discuss the influences of growing up in Nebraska on Willa Cather's and Mari Sandoz's literary works.
2. Seat the students at computers and introduce the author Loren Eiseley by having the students access and read a short biography of Eiseley, available at <http://www.eiseley.org/biography.php>.
3. Ask the students to note in their writing journals any narrative that resonates with them, or things they are curious about. Ask students to share their thoughts or notes with the class. Some of these questions could also be used to guide the discussion:
  - Eiseley used the metaphor of an "unseen artist's loft" to describe the brain of a writer. What other metaphors could be used to describe a writer or the process of writing?
  - How do you think Eiseley's childhood influenced him to become a writer?
  - Eiseley's brother Leo, his Uncle Buck, and his grandmother were positive influences in Eiseley's life. Discuss other positive influences (people, events, etc.) in Eiseley's life. Ask the students to discuss positive influences and role models in their own lives.
4. Ask students to watch the clip from NET's Next Exit "Bonehunter" show (3:46 minutes in length), available at <http://www.eiseley.org/multimedia/>.
5. Pass out copies of *The Loren Eiseley Reader* to the class. Direct students' attention to the photos in the back of the Reader, pages 205-215, and to the map of Loren Eiseley's Nebraska.
6. Have students read the article titled "Walking in the Footsteps of Loren Eiseley" by Brandon Nelson (published in the June 2014 edition of *Prairie Fire* newspaper), found at: <http://www.prairiefirenewspaper.com/2014/06/walking-in-the-footsteps-of-loren-eiseley-scientific-discoveries-in-western-nebraska>
7. Ask students to watch the 10 minute video animation and narration titled "Scenes from an Immense Journey - An Introduction to the Naturalist and Poet Loren Eiseley" produced by Western Nebraska Community College and Charles Family Productions, and found at <http://www.eiseley.org/multimedia/>
8. Homework: Students should read "The Slit" (pages 7-14) and write one paragraph that summarizes the theme of this essay. Ask students to also note in their writing journals any unfamiliar vocabulary words or phrases.

## SESSION TWO

1. Begin discussion of "The Slit" by asking students for their reaction to the narrative they've read. What themes can they identify in the essay? How does Eiseley use characters, images, and symbols to advance the story? What unfamiliar vocabulary words or phrases did students encounter?

Ask students to share their homework paragraphs with the class (collect their papers for grading at the end of class). Questions for discussion could include:

- What themes or messages is Eiseley trying to convey in this essay?
  - What places and landscapes does Eiseley mention in his essay? Consider the Slit and prairie-dog town. Are these real, figurative, or both?
  - What kinds of images do the passages suggest?
  - What kinds of feelings or thoughts do these landscapes and characters convey?
2. Explain to the class that they will be mapping (figuratively) the footsteps of Loren Eiseley, from his childhood in Lincoln and Aurora, to his days at the University of Nebraska including excursions with the Nebraska State Museum's South Party in 1931, 1932, and 1933.

Working in groups of 3-4, each group will first make a list of 6 to 8 locations in Nebraska where Loren Eiseley lived, visited or worked. The list should also include the section of the book and/or essay (in *The Loren Eiseley Reader*) where the locations are referenced.

3. Distribute the instructions for creating and editing Google maps and a sample map. Explain to the students that they will be using the Google Maps tools to produce an annotated map of Eiseley's Nebraska, identifying at a minimum six different locations where Eiseley lived and/or visited. Each map point should be annotated with the name of the location and the essay it relates to, if applicable. (Instructor should make sure that some groups choose eastern Nebraska and some choose western Nebraska locations.)
4. Have each group print their maps and turn them into you for grading (identifying the group number/members on the map). Also instruct each group to e-mail their maps to their own Gmail account.

### **SESSION THREE**

1. Use the beginning of the class period to have the groups finish any remaining work on the Google map project.
2. Instruct the students that they will work in their same groups to develop a 5 minute audio or visual presentation, using YouTube, PowerPoint or Prezi, Audacity, or similar software. The presentation will be a narrated tour of one of the locations the group has identified in the previous session.

Sightseeing tours are often narrated by people who are knowledgeable of the history, geography, and culture of an area. Students should imagine that they are guiding a walking tour of a place that is important in Loren Eiseley's life. Have students consider the following:

- Where is this place? How do you get here? How might Eiseley have traveled here in his day?
  - What happened here? Why is this important in Eiseley's life?
  - What is the history of this place? In what essay or book does Eiseley write about this place?
  - Describe the sights around you. What do you see? What do you hear?
  - Describe the people around you. What do they look like? What are they doing? How are they doing it?
  - What might have this place looked like in Eiseley's time?
3. Allow the rest of the class period and the next session to have students work on this project.

#### **SESSION FOUR**

Student groups will continue to research and finish their presentations, with instructor guidance as needed.

#### **SESSION FIVE**

Students will present their narrated tours to the entire class.

#### **ENRICHMENT**

1. Students may choose to create an annotated Google Map and/or audio/visual narrated tour of their own childhood landmarks.
2. Instruct the students to open their maps in Google Maps, and then export the map to KML (click the "folder" icon underneath the map title). Notice that the approximate GPS coordinates of each location are given. Have the students bring up Google Earth and note the satellite images of these locations, or locations nearby.

Search Maps Help



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Google Maps Help

Help forum

Check out [other useful tips for Google Maps.](#)

# Create and edit your custom maps

You can create custom maps to share online with Google My Maps. For example, create a map to track the best dog-friendly hiking trails or save new locations to expand your business.

## Make a new map

1. Sign in to Google Maps using the **Sign in** button in the top right corner of the map.
2. Make sure the search box is empty then click inside it.
3. Click **My Maps**.
4. Click the **Create** button .

## Customize your map

Add places to your map

Add lines and shapes to your map

[Go directly to My Maps](#)

## View, edit, and manage My Maps

Open an existing My Map

Delete your map

View My Maps and My Places

### How helpful is this article:

Not at all helpful

Not very helpful

Somewhat helpful

Very helpful

Extremely helpful

8+1 1.1k

# Loren Eiseley's Nebraska

## South Party Locations

- 📍 Bridgeport Quarry-The Last Neanderthal
- 📍 Bayard-The Innocent Assassins



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