Learning Ahead:

Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts

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Learning Ahead:
Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts
Seasons: July & August

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Hilltown Families, Inc.
www.HilltownFamilies.org
Who am I? Where am I? These are the fundamental questions proposed by the humanities. Inquiries related to local history, literature, and education inspire us to think deeply about the places where we live and how our identity fits into the context of our community and the seasons.

Looking through a seasonal lens, a July and August cultural itinerary for Western Massachusetts includes:

- An American holiday as a **CATALYST** for learning: Independence Day
- **PLACEMAKING** at parks and community spaces through music: Outdoor Concerts
- Resources that are ubiquitous and **NATURE-BASED**: Summer Storms
- Sweet fruits that celebrate **FOOD TRADITIONS**: Berries
- Western MA as a **CULTURAL** destination for relaxation: Vacation
- Outdoor activities that are **INTEREST-BASED**: Fishing
- Ephemeral seasonal **HABITAT**: Flower Gardens
- **INTERGENERATIONAL** outdoor living: Camping
- Learning **LENS** that connects us to the season: Boating

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**June Light** by Cummington poet Richard Wilbur

Your voice, with clear location of June days,
Called me outside the window. You were there,
Light yet composed, as in the just soft stare
Of uncontested summer all things raise
Plainly their seeming into seamless air.

Then your love looked as simple and entire
As that picked pear you tossed me, and your face
As legible as pearskin’s fleck and trace,
Which promise always wine, by mottled fire
More fatal fleshed than ever human grace.

And your gay gift—Oh when I saw it fall
Into my hands, through all that naïve light,
It seemed as blessed with truth and new delight
As must have been the first great gift of all.
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Stone Fruits & Berries
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
The call for revolution in the late 18th century echoed throughout Massachusetts as the early American colonists sought independence from the British. Our state’s history is deeply rooted in the history of the American Revolutionary War, from acts of rebellion to the many battles fought on this soil. Every 4th of July, we commemorate the patriots of the North American colonies who spoke out against a government that they felt did not truly represent them and their interests. Lasting close to a decade (1775-1783), the American Revolution shaped our country’s early identity as a nation. The places, spaces and communities that made up the Massachusetts colony played a major role in the early American cause for Independence.
While visitors to Eastern Massachusetts can walk the Freedom Trail, learn about the Boston Tea Party or tour the home of Paul Revere, folks in Western Massachusetts can explore the history of the American Revolution by witnessing historical reenactments of major battles, visiting memorials to the cause’s courageous soldiers, and commemorating the war for American Independence through community celebrations such as fireworks, barbecues, parades, and local festivities.

**Living History at Old Sturbridge Village (Sturbridge, MA)**

Every summer, Old Sturbridge Village hosts Rebels & Redcoats - a large military encampment of different reenactment groups in New England that portray the Revolutionary War. Visitors have the opportunity to walk through the encampment and watch mock battles and skirmishes. They can see historic training exercises, learn about the different military uniforms worn by the patriots and the British army and witness firearm demonstrations.

**Exploring the Revolutionary War in Western MA: Stafford Hill Memorial (Cheshire, MA)**

Located on Stafford Hill Road in Cheshire, MA, the Stafford Hill Memorial marks the grave site of Joab Stafford. Originally from Rhode Island, Stafford settled in what is now Cheshire in 1767 and formed a militia company that fought in the battle of Bennington in August, 1777. The memorial tower, constructed of fieldstone, was built and funded in 1928 by the local Sons of the American Revolution. The beautiful drive to this historic site features views of pastoral countryside and mountainous views typical of the region. At the site, visitors can see Stafford’s tomb stone which honors Stafford’s involvement in the Revolutionary War.

**Local Celebrations: 4th of July Parades and Gatherings**

Many of our local communities host parades and fireworks to honor the American cause for independence in the late 1700’s. These parades and firework displays are a reminder of our young nation’s history and the early colonists’ rebellion against an unjust government. Every 4th of July, we are reminded of their fortitude and commitment to their cause - a revolution that established the United States of America. It also serves as a day to reflect on the importance of critical social thought and the origins of democracy as a government that is for the people and by the people - an idea that is the foundation on which our country was built. Community is at the core of this
foundation – it is a community of shared ideas, inspiration and revolution that sparked the cause for independence. By gathering with neighbors, friends and family on the 4th of July, we continue to honor the relationship between community and democracy.

The Power of Words: The Declaration of Independence

Often read in grade school when students learn about the Revolutionary War, the Declaration of Independence is often not read later in life. This 4th of July, consider rereading the Declaration of Independence, a document that the 13 North American colonies drafted as a strong statement against the British monarchy and for the establishment of the United States of America. You can read the full document here: http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document

In their statement, the writers of this document declared:

“Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

Think about this:

Although written more than 200 years ago, and within a certain societal context, how can these words still hold true for contemporary society – how can the basic concept of equality and justice, as expressed in this document as the right of the people, be applied today?

How does the gathering of community for, parades, fireworks, and barbecues serve as a reminder of the colonists’ request for democratic representation and citizenship?
Summertime in Western Massachusetts brims with opportunities to spend time outdoors and gather in community spaces to listen to live music, discover new musical genres, and share musical interests while supporting local musicians. In Western Massachusetts there are many summertime concerts and music festivals for all ages to attend. Pack a picnic and share the experience with family, neighbors, and friends.

10 Places to be Inspired by Music

Tanglewood in Lenox, MA
The summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Tanglewood offers a variety of musical performances each summer season that feature both the orchestra and other guest artists. There are different musical genres offered, classical as well as rock and
jazz. At Tanglewood, audience members have the option to purchase lawn tickets and bring their own picnic to share on a blanket while listening to the music under the stars. Attending a concert at Tanglewood is also an opportunity to explore the Southern Berkshires and the town of Lenox, MA. Visitors can walk through the historic downtown, explore different dining options, and hike the public trails at Kennedy Park. www.tanglewood.org

Concerts at 7 in Plainfield, MA
Concerts at 7 is a volunteer-run non-profit organization that presents classical music concerts at the Plainfield Congregational Church in Plainfield, MA. Each season features three to five classical music performances. It’s a great opportunity to spend the day in this charming region of Western Massachusetts. Consider making a day of it outdoors by also visiting the sculpture gardens at Three Sisters Sanctuary in nearby Goshen, rafting the Deerfield River in Charlemont, or visiting the Bridge of Flowers in Shelburne Falls. Discover how community spaces like our churches, gardens, and rivers can support your interests while connecting you to Hilltown culture. www.plainfieldconcertsat7.com

The Sevenars Music Festival in Worthington, MA
Established in 1968, the Sevenars Music Festival has been described as one of the best small music festivals in the U.S. by Time Magazine. It takes place in South Worthington, a village of Worthington listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Every year, the music festival presents guest artists and music programs featuring performers from around the world and includes enrichment programs for children. Sevenars is a local way to explore music and art in the Hilltowns of Western Massachusetts during the summer, connecting interest in music, place, and local history. www.sevenars.org

Other place and opportunities:

- **Amherst**: Amherst Downtown Summer Music Series: www.amherstdowntown.com
- **Florence**: Music on the Porch Series: www.florencecivic.org
- **Greenfield**: Green River Festival: www.greenriverfestival.com
- **Greenfield**: Coop Concerts Summer Concert Series at Greenfield Energy Park: www.coopconcerts.org
- **Hadley**: Wednesday Folk Traditions at the Porter-Phelps-Huntington Museum: www.pphmuseum.org
- **Westfield**: Beveridge Pavilion at Stanley Park: www.stanleypark.org
- **Williamsburg**: Angel Park Summer Music Series: www.facebook.com/AngelParkQuietReflectionsGarden
Music Inspired by Place

Hometowns, distant cities, and small communities have inspired many musicians to compose songs that reflect the places they value. Hilltown resident and local musician Aaron Lewis wrote a country song, *Massachusetts*, in honor of his home state and the places that make Massachusetts unique and special, including the Berkshires and the town of Worthington in the following lyrics:

“The north shore is where my father lives
I wear my Red Sox hat around the world with pride
But the Berkshires are where my heart is
And when I see them in the distance I could cry
Because I’m home…”

“So I just pass the sign that welcomes me to Worthington
Established long before this country came to be
A place that hasn’t really changed with time
The way this country that I love, it used to be
Because I’m home…”

Think about this:

When you hear a song about a place you love, how does it make you feel?

How does music capture a place’s personality, past, or people?

Why do you think music has the power to bring people together, strengthen community, and allow people to connect to local places and spaces?
While winter in New England brings Nor’easters and blizzards that cover Western Massachusetts in deep snow, summer brings thunderstorms that soak the soil and bring a deep intensity to the summer’s verdant landscape. There is something humbling about a strong thunderstorm as it approaches with its dark clouds, bolts of lightning and claps of thunder that exemplify nature’s unpredictability and larger-than-life personality.

A Dramatic Scene: Storms and Literature

In Kathryn Schulz’s article, "Writers in the Storm: How Weather Went From Symbol to Science and Back Again," from The New Yorker, she discusses the symbology of weather in literature and how meteorology is often utilized to describe our personalities and interactions. Storms are a perfect example of these comparisons and analogies. They are typically used to personify stormy personalities, dreary events or intense moments of drama. (Google: Schulz Storm New Yorker.)

It is said that Herman Melville, who once lived at Arrowhead in Pittsfield, MA, was inspired to write his sea adventure, Moby Dick. He and fellow author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, after reading William Cullen Bryant’s poem, Monument Mountain, decided to hike up the same mountain, located in Great Barrington, MA. During the excursion, shared with other friends of the authors, a thunderstorm rolled in and the party sought shelter in a cave. There Melville and Hawthorne discussed their upcoming works and ideas. It is said that, from the cave, Melville looked out to see a view of Mt. Greylock. From a distance, the mountain appeared like a whale breaching the water and helped inspired the author’s novel, Moby Dick. In Melville’s novel, there is a scene in chapter 119 in which a storm and strange weather appears. Check out a copy from your local library and add it to your summer reading.

Interested in learning more about Melville? Curious to hike the same mountain where Melville was inspired? Both are located in Western Massachusetts in Berkshire County:
Arrowhead Farm - Berkshire Historical Society, Pittsfield, MA

Herman Melville and his family moved to Arrowhead Farm in 1850. Visitors can enjoy guided tours of Arrowhead daily. www.mobydick.org

Monument Mountain - The Trustees, Great Barrington, MA

Hikers can climb Monument Mountain and enjoy views of Mt. Greylock and New York's Catskill Mountains. www.thetrustees.org

Anne Brontë is another poet who uses weather as a way to describe the intensity of inspiration and creativity in her poem, "Lines Composed in a Wood on a Windy Day." Read the poem at www.poets.org and search for other poems that integrate storms into their craft.

Think about this:

What other novels or poems have you read that use weather (thunderstorms, sunshine, snowstorms or other meteorological events) to evoke feeling or drama?

What characteristics of thunderstorms embody typical characteristics associated with melodrama?

What do you enjoy about a thunderstorm? Is it the sound? The smell of the rain? The sight of the incoming clouds rolling in? How do they connect you to your place?
Summer is the season of berry picking and canning! It’s the time of year when pies are baked and fruit is canned to enjoy during the colder months.

During the months of July and August, blueberries become ready for picking. There are many farms in Western MA where you can pick your own berries, or farm stands and markets to purchase local berries to enjoy at home.

At www.poets.org, read Robert Frost’s poem “Blueberries” before heading out to your nearby blueberry farm to fill your pail. Consider the first and last stanza and how Frost describes the beauty of the ripe blueberry:
“Blueberries as big as the end of your thumb,
Real sky-blue, and heavy, and ready to drum
In the cavernous pail of the first one to come!
And all ripe together, not some of them green
And some of them ripe! You ought to have seen!”

As you read the rest the poem, consider how it is structured. As a conversation between two people? What are they discussing? How is the blueberry and berry picking discussed in this poem? Bring the poem with you and read it together amongst a colony of blueberry bushes.

Once your pails are brimming with ripe fruit, eat them fresh and bring some home too to prepare blueberry preserves, blueberry buckle, and blueberry pies!

Do you know the history of the pie? The concept of pie as food can be traced to ancient civilizations where basic types of pastries were produced with the use of oils and grains. Pies, as we know them today, originated in the Middle Ages as a pastry to enclose a filling. In the United States, American pies were derived from traditional
English pies. They often had a crude crust, but were an easy way to feed many in a family, since the crust required less flour than bread and was a way to utilize different ingredients.

For more information about the history of pie, check out a food timeline illustrating the evolution of pies throughout the centuries and different cultures at www.foodtimeline.org/foodpies.html.

Thinking about berry picking for your own pie-making or canning adventures? Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture’s web site, www.farmfresh.org, is a great resource for locating local farms near you to pick berries during the different berry growing seasons. Visiting a local farm in your area connects us with our regional landscape, gives us experience with the historic tradition of New England agriculture, and connects us with family, friends, and neighbors while engaging in a traditional activity that has been practiced for centuries.

**Think about this:**

What pies do you traditionally bake?

Do you have a favorite family recipe?

How is pie baking determined by the season?

How does canning allow us to enjoy a particular season’s bounty year round, particularly during the non-growing seasons?

How does blueberry picking in the summer allow you to engage and get to know our community?

How can pies shape our memories and connect us to those we have spent time with and who are an important part of our personal history?
Ripening Raspberries

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
In the 19th century, New England was a popular place for outdoor recreation. At a time when the American landscape was championed for its unique, natural features, setting it apart from Europe, Americans were interested in exploring the mountains and woods that defined this country's geography. In fact, as you discovered in the Summer Storms section of this issue of Learning Ahead, 19th century authors Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville participated in outdoor recreation by hiking up Monument Mountain. Henry David Thoreau, another 19th century author and transcendentalist, climbed Mt. Greylock, located in Adams, MA. Another scenic spot for recreational tourists was the Summit House at Skinner State Park (then known as Mt. Holyoke) which operated as a hotel, allowing visitors to stay overnight while visiting. As you can see, Western Massachusetts was a popular destination for 19th century Americans with many of the outdoor places and summits still available for today’s hikers and outdoor enthusiasts to explore.

While many Americans travelled throughout New England, exploring the different summits and rural landscapes that defined this region, others were city dwellers who often took up residence in Western Massachusetts to enjoy summer vacations away from the city. For example, although the poet William Cullen Bryant grew up in Cummington, he spent the majority of his life in New York City. In 1865, he purchased his childhood home and summered there from 1866-1878. Even today Western Massachusetts’ rural landscapes provide a summer retreat for those looking to enjoy outdoor recreational opportunities as well as art, culture and local food. As a result, summer in Western Massachusetts is filled with various festivals, art celebrations, local food gatherings, guided hikes, paddles, triathlons, and other programs that engage both year round and summer residents with the culture and identity of the region as highlighted by the seasonal landscape.
**Historic Houses**

During the summer, historic houses are open for tours and guided experiences for visitors. Some were the summer homes of famous authors, writers, and poets, while others were full time residences. Historic homes act as the gateway to the past through their collections and objects that tell the everyday stories of those who lived there and how they interacted with their environment.

- **Amherst:** Emily Dickinson Museum. www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org
- **Cummington:** William Cullen Bryant Homestead. www.thetrustees.org
- **Hadley:** The Porter-Phelps-Huntington House Museum. www.pphmuseum.org
- **Holyoke:** Wistariahurst Museum. wistariahurst.org
- **Pittsfield:** Arrowhead Museum, The Berkshire Historical Society. www.mobydick.org
- **Stockbridge:** Chesterwood, National Trust for Historic Preservation. chesterwood.org
- **Stockbridge:** Mission House. www.thetrustees.org
- **Stockbridge:** Naumkeag. www.thetrustees.org

**Think about this:**

How can historic houses connect us to local history and the past?

How can they tell us about the people who lived there and how they interacted with their immediate community and environment?

What similarities and differences do you think exist between the way people enjoyed the outdoors back in the 19th century and the way we interact with the outdoors today?

If you were to go on a summer retreat, what part of New England would you travel to? Why?

What aspects do you look for in a summer retreat that those that vacationed here in New England may also have sought after?
Summer time is the season for fishing! Whether your interest is in science or sport, there are many places to go fishing in Western Massachusetts as a way to connect with the local landscape while spending time outdoors. There are different types of local fishing, including freshwater fishing, fly fishing, and ice fishing. Fishing, or angling, is a sport that provides a direct interaction with our rivers and lakes as well as a meditative and tranquil way to relax and enjoy nature quietly.

The art of fly fishing has even inspired writers to create stories based on the sport, such as David James Duncan’s contemporary novel *The River Why* (1983). Voted the 35th best novel in the San Francisco Chronicle list of “The
20th Century's 100 Best Books of the American West," the novel centers on a young man from a fishing-centric family who moves to a small cabin in the foothills of the Oregon Coast Range and spends most of his days fly fishing. The novel was also made into a film in 2010. Check your local library to see if the novel or film is available.

The Westfield River is designated as a National Wild & Scenic River with over 78 miles of headwater tributaries and three major waterway branches. Its East Branch is also a favorite of fly fishers. It is one of the best cold water fisheries in Massachusetts and has some of the cleanest water. The rustic beauty of New England in summer can be seen and experienced along the banks of the Westfield River. There are many recreational opportunities besides fishing, such as paddling, hiking, swimming, mountain bike riding, and picnicking. Local citizens form the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee which oversees the preservation of the watershed’s resources and its connection to the local community. They often sponsor programs along the river to learn more about the river’s ecology and resources. For more information on their upcoming programs and events, or to learn more about the conservation work they are doing along the river, visit www.westfieldriverwildscenic.org.

Looking for a place to fish in Western MA? The web site, www.visit-massachusetts.com, has a comprehensive list of Berkshire and Pioneer Valley fishing locations.

**Think about this:**

What is the fishing cultural heritage of New England?

How has Western Massachusetts participated in this culture as both consumer and through recreation?

Before the invention of refrigerators and freezers, how was fish preserved?

How were fish caught before the introduction of contemporary materials?

Do you know how many species of fish live in the Connecticut River? The Westfield River? The Housatonic River?
Summer is the season of flower-studded meadows and blossoms on the wayside or at home in our gardens. Nothing says summer like a freshly picked bouquet of Oxeye Daisies or New England Asters. Summer is also the time of year when public gardens are open to visitors wanting to learn about botany or just enjoy the beauty of cultivated flowers. These public gathering places connect community to the growing season and to the incredible beauty and diversity of nature. In Western Massachusetts there are a few public gardens to explore and enjoy that may offer inspiration to the artist, writer, or botanist inside us all:

- Lenox: The Mount. www.edithwharton.org
- Northampton: Childs Park. www.childspark.org
- Northampton: The Botanic Garden of Smith College. www.smith.edu/garden
- Pittsfield: The Vincent J. Hebert Arboretum at Springside Park. www.hebertarboretum.org
- Shelburne Falls: The Bridge of Flowers. www.bridgeofflowersmass.org
- Stockbridge: Berkshire Botanical Garden. berkshirebotanical.org
- Stockbridge: Naumkeag. www.thetrustees.org
- Westfield: Stanley Park. www.stanleypark.org

When visiting, take your camera, sketchpad, colored pencils, and identification book. See if you can capture the structural differences in different species by considering their leaf shape and petal variations. Later in the season, once the bloom has passed, how does it go to seed? What are the shapes of the seeds? Can you capture this with your camera? How about through illustration? All gardens and flowers can be your study as you attempt to create a botanical illustration.

Botanical illustrations were once a common practice, dating back to the 16th century in Europe. Before cameras, botanical illustrations were particularly useful for the recording of medicinal herbs. Botanical illustrators of gardens were also employed by royal courts to paint the royal gardens.

In the 19th century, many women illustrators produced books showcasing their watercolors and paintings of different flowers and plant specimens. Women were active botanical artists, often painting in their spare time as a hobby. Some were
Wildflowers
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
serious illustrators and writers of literature on the topic. In fact, many important horticultural journals included illustrations created by women artists. Learn more about these well-known female illustrators of the Victorian era at www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/hort/women.htm.

Interested in becoming a botanical illustrator? The New England Society of Botanical Illustrators often hosts juried shows open to the public. Attending one of their shows is an opportunity to see the kind of contemporary botanical illustrations being done in New England and to give a curious artist a chance to see what kind of media and techniques are used to create botanical works.

Additionally, taking a class with an artist who specializes in botanical illustration can provide the scientific and artistic instruction needed to learn how to create botanical drawings. Botanical illustrations are not just limited to painting flowers, but also include sketching trees and other plant specimens. Not only is botanical illustration a creative outlet, it is also a scientific one that lets you explore a plant species at an observational and focused level!

The American Society of Botanical Illustrators provides different resources and tools to help students locate classes in their area or informational books on doing an individual study of botanical illustration.

Gardens and wayside flowers offer an opportunity to engage with the landscape through art, literature, and community. Whether it’s botanical watercolors, illustrations, photography, or a relaxed visit to your local public garden, flowers blooming in a community support interests and connect residents to their public parks and the patterns of the seasons.

Think about this:

How does botanical illustration bridge art and science?

How are public gardens places of connection, not only to the nature cultivated there, but also to local community and people?

Why do you think botanical illustration flourished in the Victorian era?
Summer is camping season! Campgrounds are open, tents are aired out, and the makings for s'mores are ready for starry nights surrounding the campfire telling stories and enjoying each other's company. The smell of the campfire defines the spirit of summer outdoors in New England.

Backcountry camping is different from car camping. Car camping allows folks to pack all of their gear into their car, drive to a campsite, and pitch a tent at a maintained campground or an area for camping. Generally, your car is close to where you pitch your tent, and most campground areas have sites and amenities (such as showers, rental equipment, and trails). Backcountry camping involves carrying everything you need in your pack, so you must pack light. It also means you might be setting up camp in the woods in an area of your discretion, as opposed to having a site with amenities. It's a different experience; both allow for a range of adventure. Each year, many adventurous folks embark on hiking and camping along the Appalachian Trail (AT). This trail is 2,190 miles, traverses 14 states (Georgia to Maine), and is visited by three million people each year. The AT covers quite a few areas in Western Massachusetts, including our state’s tallest peak, Mount Greylock in Adams, MA, which stands at 3,491 feet. While some attempt to hike and camp the entire AT, which can take several months, others choose to hike sections of the trail closest to where they live. In Massachusetts, one can learn more about hiking and camping areas of the Appalachian Trail by visiting the Department of Conservation and
Inspired to hike the AT, camp along the trail, or take your family camping? It’s best to make sure you are prepared. There are many local outfitters in our region that can help you get ready and understand the kind of gear and equipment you will need, provide safety/first aid recommendations and learn the location of local trails. Be sure to also check your local library or AMC (Appalachian Mountain Club) chapter to learn about different courses for backpacking and backcountry camping.

**Local Outfitters**

- The Arcadian Shop - Lenox, MA
- Berkshire Outfitters - Adams, MA
- Sam’s Outdoor Outfitters - Hadley, MA
- Eastern Mountain Sports - Hadley, MA & Pittsfield, MA

**Local Campgrounds**

- Tully Lake Campground, The Trustees & Army Corps of Engineers - Royalston, MA
- October Mountain State Park, The Department of Conservation & Recreation - Lee, MA
- DAR State Forest, The Department of Conservation & Recreation - Goshen, MA
- Mohawk Trail State Forest, The Department of Conservation & Recreation - Charlemont, MA

If you’re looking for literary inspiration and a good laugh, read Bill Bryson’s *A Walk in the Woods*. It describes Bryson’s journey along the AT, hiking with an old friend, and their various comical adventures and difficulties backpacking and camping. It also provides a good history of the trail and is a great read.

Poetry is another literary point of entry to camping, including "Camping Out" by Edwin Gladding Burrows which you can find at www.poetryfoundation.org. Give it a read and notice how Burrows describes the natural world around him to evoke profound memories synonymous with the different plant and bird species he witnesses.

"I listened for the rain at Mt. Monadnock, for the barred owl on a tent peak among scrub pines in Michigan. I can hear my father stir"
and the cot creak. The flap opens.
He goes out and never returns
though the coffee steams on the grill
and the redstart sings in the alders."

The description of his tent and the coffee being prepared are two aspects of camping with which most campers are familiar, simple moments with simple tasks. In Burrows’ poem, the reader has a sensory experience. It’s almost as if you can feel the soft earth, smell the pines, or hear the sound of rain hitting the tent. Camping allows the senses to become more in tune with the natural world, it reduces our living routine to the essentials tasks that remind us of simple living and of the other creatures and plants with which we share our environment.

Think about this:

How does camping remind us to live simply?

Who created the Appalachian Trail? Why?

If you were to write a poem about camping like Burrows, what aspects of camping would you focus on?

What particular activities or moments remind you of camping?

How can camping connect you with a deeper appreciation of your home and all its modern day amenities?
Boating: Natural History & Outdoor Fun

The water is warmer and the ponds, lakes, and rivers are swelling with water from summer thunderstorms. Whether it's in a kayak or a canoe, paddling on the open water offers a unique perspective to witness wildlife, get exercise, and enjoy the outdoors.

•Learning LENS that connects us to the season

Building watercrafts to traverse water is an ancient practice. In the Americas, there are many examples of indigenous canoes that allow for water travel across rivers and lakes. Often, these watercraft were built by hand from bark, animal skins and logs and utilized for travel and trade. Compare the craft of these older boats with modern canoes today which are often built out of fiberglass by machines.

While kayaks seem to have originated in Greenland and were first utilized in cold climates, the canoe was built and used throughout the world by different cultures and peoples. Canoes were built with open tops and still keep this feature today. Kayaks originated in the Arctic as closed top boats to prevent the icy water from getting into the boat, usually by stretching animal skins over the top. Canoes: A Natural History in North America by Mark Neuzil and Norman Sims is excellent for learning more about the history of canoeing.

There are many unique waterways in Western Massachusetts to explore and connect with our local landscape. If you don’t have a boat for paddling, check out your local outdoor outfitter for boat rentals.

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
Additionally, many campgrounds open for day use offer boat rentals for paddling adventures.

- Tully Lake Campground, The Trustees & Army Corps of Engineers - Royalston, MA
- DAR State Forest, Department of Conservation & Recreation - Goshen, MA
- Mount Tom State Reservation, Department of Conservation & Recreation - Holyoke, MA
- Pittsfield State Forest, Department of Conservation & Recreation - Pittsfield, MA
- Bartholomew’s Cobble, The Trustees - Sheffield, MA
- Zoar Outdoor Adventure - Charlemont, MA

In addition to literature and primary source experiences, canoeing can also be explored through art. At the Harvard Art Museum, Winslow Homer’s watercolor painting, “Canoe in Rapids” (1897) shows two men crossing rapids in a canoe. The New England artist chooses to show the two canoers from behind the boat and places them in the center of the painting with the surrounding landscape of trees meeting at the horizon. The composition of the painting creates a tunneled or v-shaped perspective: the viewer’s eye is immediately drawn to the center where the two canoers are paddling. Additionally, the painting features many summit-like formations: the waves in the water are angular with sharp points, as are the canoe, the trees, and the formation of the landscape as it converges into the center of the painting.

Interested in seeing more of Winslow Homer’s works and his seascapes? The Clark, a museum in Williamstown, MA, features beautiful examples of Winslow Homer’s work in their permanent collection.

Think about this:

Has the shape and form of a canoe changed over the centuries? What other objects do we use that have not changed their form and function over time. Why?

Why do you think Winslow Homer chooses to paint the canoers from that particular perspective? What does it accomplish?

What type of wildlife or new perspectives of the natural world do you think paddling offers that differ from hiking on land?
Swallowtails
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
ABOUT HILLTOWN FAMILIES

Who am I? Where am I? These are the fundamental questions proposed by the humanities. Inquiries related to local history, literature, and education inspire us to think deeply about the places where we live and how our identity fits into the context of our communities and the seasons.

Hilltown Families’ mission is to support the common good of our community through the development of a sense of place by a shared understanding in the value of self-directed learning through community engagement. These learning values are referred to as “community-based education” and are accessible and inclusive to an intergenerational audience. This process of learning unites community members through shared interests, establishes a shared history, and deepens a connection to place.

Hilltown Families believes in creating resilient and sustainable communities by developing and strengthening a sense of place in our children and citizens through community-based education and engagement. Established in 2005 by Sienna Wildfield, Hilltown Families identifies, curates, and shares community-based learning opportunities that reflect back to the community its potential while impacting the culture. Community members of all ages are encouraged to engage in repeating social and environmental patterns that support interests, building upon seasonal cycles to support learning found in the intersections of food, habitat, and culture within community resources, events, and opportunities.

Funded in part by Mass Humanities, Learning Ahead: Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts is a bimonthly publication produced by Hilltown Families that sheds light on embedded learning opportunities found in cultural resources that exist within the geography, history, and cultural traditions of the Hilltowns and surrounding area.

With these seasonal itineraries, self-directed teens, lifelong learners and families are encouraged to engage together in cultural opportunities that support similar interests, resulting in a shared history and a strengthened sense of place.

By emphasizing place-based exploration through humanities inquiry, these cultural itineraries connect residents of all ages to their place, helping to shape a more comprehensive understanding of our cultural identity, heritage, and history. This contributes to establishing meaningful relationships between young people, elders, and more active citizens.

Hilltown Families is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. www.HilltownFamilies.org