

Bringing Wonder to the Classroom: The Humanities and Leisure Studies

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Abstract

This article proposes a way to reclaim awe and wonder for courses in recreation practice and leisure studies. By considering leisure studies as a humanistic discipline, and by employing works of art as teaching strategies, we may be able to bring more inspired learning to recreation courses. A directory of works of art and their leisure lessons, and a sample class lesson plan based on art, poetry and music are provided as illustration.

Keywords: humanities, leisure studies, art, literature, music, classroom teaching

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In its first issue of the millennium, the *Journal of Leisure Research* published a series of essays in which the authors worried about the future of leisure research and leisure studies. Concerns included leisure's ability to make a difference – and about our ability to know that it does. As well, and in particular, a sub-set of essays in the issue focused on concerns about leisure as an intellectual pursuit. For example, Godbey (2000, p. 37) discussed the separation of scholars in universities brought about by over specialization of the academic content of subject areas. Similarly, Searle (2000, p. 138) lamented the lack of reciprocity with other disciplines. As he decried, we use everyone else's theories and research, but nobody pays any attention to ours. Samdahl (2000, p. 125) was upset with leisure studies' adherence to the status quo – its inability to be in the forefront of emergent knowledge. The thesis of this paper is that a solution to these concerns is found within the necessity of inspired reading and seeing.

This solution is nudged by what Rorty (1996) calls attacks of knowingness. That is, "academic disciplines are subject to being overtaken by attacks of 'knowingness' – a state of mind and soul that prevents shudders of awe and makes one immune to enthusiasm" (p. A48). Rorty's is a complicated argument but essentially follows a line of thinking that says that teachers in American colleges and universities, who make up what the literary critic Harold Bloom has called the School of Resentment, are abandoning inspiration for professionalism. Via both insinuation and declaration this is the theme, as well, of the

Godbey, Searle, and Samdahl millennium essays. As Samdahl (2000) expressed it: "My concern is that North American leisure studies has structural and historical factors that keep it tied to the status quo ... to a professional framework that separates us from the broader study of leisure and moves us away from the disciplinary roots" (p. 126). She further concludes that these profession-based traditions are not adequate for survival in the coming century.

Rorty goes out on a similar limb. He maintains that today's professors have "trained students to brush past romance and to spot nonsense" (1996, p. A48). To extend this to our concern, the cause of the complaint is that professors of recreation and leisure studies for the most part teach students to brush past heart-stopping poetry to memorize categories and procedures for delivering professional services. The idea of reading literature or gazing at a 200-year-old painting is, for these students, laughable, but my argument is that it is our only hope. Undergraduates are assigned to read textbooks; graduate students are assigned to read research articles. However, these assignments only address student's needs to know. To view a text knowingly, as a product of the mechanisms of academic accreditation and professional certification, gives understanding but not hope, knowledge but not self-transformation. Our students read textbooks and learn how to perform a skill, but they can rarely feel the power of why. They are just not swept off their feet by the literature of "knowingness."

This article proposes a way to reclaim awe and enthusiasm for courses in recreation practice and leisure studies. I believe we need to bring more shudders of wonderment to class and for me this is through the humanities – specifically literature, poetry, art and music. I am suggesting that we consider leisure studies as a humanistic discipline, as well as a psychological, sociological, and economic one. I think that recreation and leisure studies must make room for soppy Thoreau and Emerson essays as well as for the tight science of pricing models. I advocate that faculty in recreation be both the knowing, analytical kind – those who produce professional knowingness – as well as the sort who can demonstrate a wild, unreflective infatuation with inspiring works of art, poetry, music, and literature.

My plea for humanities' place in the recreation classroom is not original. In the 1991 issue of *Scholé: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*, Miriam Lahey also advised a humanities approach to leisure studies. "A humanistic approach to leisure studies should include literature as a central element, but literature remains a much neglected element both in scholarly effort and in the curriculum" (p. 14). Her thesis was that literature is so bound up with being human that it offers a unique avenue for exploring the diversity and expansiveness of leisure, for getting at those qualities in leisure that make it almost impossible to define. Similarly and more recently another paper in *Scholé* (Estes, 2000) declared that studying leisure from a humanist perspective will help educators to "further clarify what is unique about a recreation and leisure studies graduate, agree on the content of the core body of knowledge, and move the profession towards a resolution of the unique role that recreation and leisure plays in

society” (p. 13). Both papers speak to what is “special” about leisure – that is, its grounding in the humanities.

To review, then, the point is rephrased as a question. Why is bringing the humanities into the recreation classroom such a good idea? Rorty’s argument, of course, is one explanation: the humanities are a major source of awe and enthusiasm for learners. Another explanation, one that is uniquely that of leisure studies, is that much of the intellectual grounding for today’s leisure thought can be found in the humanities. As Lahey (1991) pointed out, the history of Western education holds that leisure lies at the heart of what we call the liberal arts, or at least that the interplay between leisure and the subjects of the humanities is very close.

How the Humanities Reveal Leisure

The most accomplished works of painting, sculpture, music, and literature are studied for what they reveal about human life (Benton & DiYanni, 1998). They open doors to the values and belief systems from which those artworks sprang. They also tell us about human attitudes and feelings, about ideas and ideals that continue to have relevance today. Works of art from different cultures reveal common human experiences of love and loss, hope and frustration, elation and despair. Through all this, the study of the humanities invites each of us to consider our personal, social, and cultural values. For all these reasons, the humanities refer to leisure.

When we study leisure through the humanities our attention is focused on these questions (from Benton & DiYanni, 1998):

1. *What kind of artwork is it?* To what artistic category, or genre, does it belong? A European Renaissance painting, for example, might be a portrait, landscape, or religious icon. One way to adopt the humanities into the recreation classroom, therefore, is to use it to learn about various art forms, which are a part of the lexicon of leisure anyway. For example, students learn the differences between a symphony, a string quartet, and a cantata.

2. *Why was the artwork made?* What was its function, purpose, or use? Who was responsible for producing it? These questions lead to considerations of context. Many works of art were commissioned by religious institutions, which set the context for understanding leisure’s expression in such church-dominated historical periods as the Middle Ages. Also many eighteenth and nineteenth century string quartets and piano trios were written for performance at the home of wealthy patrons who paid composers to write them. Understanding this context bolsters understanding such contemporary concepts in leisure studies as family leisure and leisure as entertainment.

3. *What does the work express or convey?* What does it reveal about its historical and social roots? These questions lead to considerations of meaning. The humanities reveal not only the artist’s or writer’s feelings and thoughts, but also cultural attitudes

and social values. Some sculptures are intended to record actual events or encourage (or discourage) particular types of behavior — often leisure behaviors. A Chinese brush painting or lyric poem may express a supreme regard for nature or the importance of solitude, and other qualities of leisure.

4. *How was the artwork made or constructed?* Here the attention is on technique. During the Baroque Age a sculpture was most likely made by carving marble, while in the 1960s sculpture might have been produced by assembling found objects. Developments in technology have continually liberated the artistic imagination. Applications to leisure as technology and creativity could be inspired by answering this question.

5. *What are the parts or elements of a work of art?* How are these parts related to create a unified artwork? These questions lead to considerations of formal analysis, understanding the ways the artwork coheres as a whole. Understanding line, form, color, composition, and texture can lead to understanding aesthetics. Understanding the structure of a 1930s Blues song or a Japanese haiku leads to an appreciation of their artistic integrity and their meaning.

6. *What social, cultural, and moral values does the work express, reflect, or embody?* Works of art directly reflect the times and circumstances of their creation — even when the individual artist, composer, or writer worked against the cultural ethos of the times. We study works of art, therefore, to understand the human values, such as leisure, that they embody. This, in turn, gives us insight into human experience. A study of the café paintings of Manet and Renoir, for example, show us the importance of a leisurely lifestyle to Parisians of the time — a legacy for perhaps contemporary losses of social capital.

Balancing the answers to these questions tell us uniquely personal visions of leisure. “Works of art are experiments in living” (Benton & DiYanni, 1998, p. xiv) and through experiencing them we can experience the social, cultural, and historical realities of leisure.

Ideally the inclusion of humanities in leisure studies suggests an entire semester-long course that directly explores the voice of works of art in leisure. As an initial attempt, however, this is not feasible for many of us. Another way to bring more humanities study into the recreation classroom is infusion of works of art into the teaching tools and subject matter of regular leisure studies courses. Table 1 provides a brief list of these possibilities for purposes of illustration.

A Lesson Plan

According to the 1999 SPRE Core Curriculum Study (reported by Powell, 2000) 85 percent of colleges and universities with recreation curricula require a core course in management/administration. To further illustrate how the humanities can be infused into a leisure studies course, following is a class lesson plan for a management/administration course.

TABLE 1

An Abridged Catalog of Humanities and Leisure Connections

Category	Title	Artist/Author	Leisure Concept
Painting	Codex Mendoza	(Aztec)	full account of early 16th century Aztec life including the role of ritual as leisure
Painting	Hay Wain	Hieronymus Bosch	metaphor for material possessions as sin; leisure as consumption
Painting	Pilgrimage to Cythera	Jean-Antoine Watteau	leisure as hedonism
Painting	American Lake Scene	Thomas Cole	leisure as solitude
Painting	The Scream	Edvard Munch	"the scream of nature;" a sensitive person overwhelmed by nature's power
Painting	The Boating Party	Mary Cassatt	pleasure in the outdoors
Painting	The Night Café	Vincent van Gogh	deviant leisure
Painting	Nighthawks	Edward Hopper	alienation of urban life
Painting	Marilyn Monroe Diptych	Andy Warhol	popular culture
Literature	Hamlet	Shakespeare	emblem of Renaissance Culture
Literature	Book of the Courtier	Baldassare Castiglione	16th century ideas about sport as war
Literature	The Cloud	Shelley	nature as romanticism
Literature	O Solitude! If I Must with Thee Dwell	Keats	leisure as solitude
Literature	Paradise Lost	John Milton	classical humanism
Literature	Sketches by Boz (The Gin Shop)	Charles Dickens	leisure as problem
Literature	The Fiddler of The Reels	Thomas Hardy	rational recreation
Literature	Walden	Henry David Thoreau	the contemporary downshifter movement

TABLE 1 (Continued)

An Abridged Catalog of Humanities and Leisure Connections

Category	Title	Artist/Author	Leisure Concept
Literature	Jane Eyre (Act III) from the play	Charlotte Bronte	pleasure of control (the end of fun)
Literature	A Good Café on The Place St. Michel	Ernest Hemingway	everyday leisure; boredom
Literature	Mrs. Dalloway's Party	Virginia Woolf	objective & subjective time
Music	Thus Spake Zarathustra	Strauss	impact of Industrial Age on leisure
Music	Jazz selections	Woodie Guthrie	history of pleasure and others
Music	Summertime	George Gershwin	the "sound" of modern leisure (classical & jazz)
Music	Mississippi Delta Blues selections	Robert Johnson and others	leisure as a cultural expression
Music	Whole Lot of Shakin' Going On	Jerry Lee Lewis	Dawson's leisure as reproduction and resistance
Music	The Twist	Chubby Checker	transition of popular culture to youth controlled

Course. Management/Administration Course

Topic. Management of Resources: Stewardship of Land

Learning themes. 1) To understand how the mood of the Romantic period in the 19th Century led the way for outdoor recreation resources, and 2) To be intrigued by how these early ideas remain important to the management of natural resources by recreation professionals today

Assigned readings. (1) Patin, T. (1999). Exhibitions and empire: National Parks and the Performance of Manifest Destiny. *Journal of American Culture*, 22, (1-2), 41-59. (2) Appropriate chapter or section from text for the course. (For example, Chapter 9 – Physical Resources Management – In van der Smissen, B., Moiseichik, M., Hartenburg, V.J., & Twardzik, L.F. (1999). *Management of Park and Recreation Agencies*. Ashburn, VA: National Recreation and Park Association.

Lesson outline. The **warm-up session** (10 minutes) has two parts: paintings and poetry. First, select 6 to 8 slides or images of the western landscape paintings and photo-

graphs of Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), C.E. Watkins (1829-1916) and Thomas Moran (1837-1926). For example, Moran's *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* is ideal. At the very beginning of class, slowly show the paintings to the class. The larger the screened images the better. Ask students to simply look at the paintings and wonder where they depict and the qualities of the landscape that are featured. There is no discussion at this point; it is a silent activity.

Second, hand out, or feature on the screen, the poem by Wordsworth in Table 2. Asking a student to read the poem out loud to the class is an effective way of presenting it. Ask the students if they have had the experience in the poem too? Ask them if they can remember the transfixing sight of golden daffodils? And then later, as for the poet, can they remember this sight? Do daffodils "dance" again, later, in your memory?

TABLE 2

*Warm-up Exercise***I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud**

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

*Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

*The waves beside them danced; but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee;
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company;
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:*

*For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.*

(Wordsworth, 1950, p. 494)

While you will want to develop your own **introductory lecture** (25 minutes), the following is a sample script.

In the early nineteenth century, the new American nation prided itself upon its political system, but it lagged far behind Europe in cultural achievement. Rather than taking pride in authors and artists, the country reveled in the one thing it had in abundance – land. After Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana territory from Napoleon in 1803, the American landscape became, in effect, the nation’s cultural inheritance. And as the country was subsequently explored, the treasures it held, in beauty as well as gold, excited the American populace. It was the artists and photographers, in accompanying the expeditions to the West, who publicized the beauty of the landscape.

The painter Albert Bierstadt accompanied Colonel Frederick Lander to the Rockies in 1859. The photographer C.E. Watkins traveled to Yosemite in 1861. The painter Thomas Moran went with Colonel Ferdinand V. Hayden of the National Geographic Survey through the Rockies to Yellowstone in 1871. Bierstadt’s paintings and Watkins’s photographs were the primary reason that Lincoln signed into law a bill establishing Yosemite as a national preserve in 1864. In 1872, Congress purchased Moran’s Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone for \$10,000 and later hung the massive painting in the lobby of the Senate. On March 1, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the Yellowstone Park Act into law, establishing the National Park System.

These artists were part of the Romantic art movement. This era emphasized the aesthetic imagination, and this can be seen in the paintings of our natural landscape at the time.

At this point in the lecture go back through the slides of paintings and photographs and identify the titles and artists. Also encourage students to notice the swirl of light, and the inexactitude and indeterminacy characterizing the views. Then, play a selection of Frederic Chopin’s music. For example Nocturne No. 2 in E Flat will accomplish the goal of asking students to listen for the floating, indefinite pattern ... “destroying the rigid frameworks of form ... like sheets of mist” (Delacroix, as quoted in Benton and DiYanni, 1998, p. 256). Mist was actually one of the favorite subjects of many Romantic painters. Now, return to the lecture.

Romanticism is an attitude more than a style, but it depends upon a growing trust in subjective experience (like leisure itself), particularly in the emotions and feelings of individuals. The Romantics had a love for anything that elicits such feelings, including the forces of nature in a magnificent or unpredictable moment, such as a sunset after a storm. Romantic artists, poets and composers were fascinated by the strange and the marvelous. They celebrated the commonplace, seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary.

So, we can say that today’s national parks are a legacy from the Romantics of the nineteenth century. But what does this have to do with today? In 1980, the National Park Service explained the situation this way: “Yellowstone, Great Smokey Mountains, Ever-

glades, and Glacier – most of these great parks were at one time pristine areas surrounded and protected by vast wilderness regions. Today, with their surrounding buffer zones gradually disappearing, many of these parks are experiencing significant and widespread adverse effects associated with external encroachment” (Benton & DiYanni, 1998, p. 256). Today our national parks are increasingly threatened. Automobiles have been banned from Yosemite, parts of Mesa Verde, and others as well. In the early 1980s, developers proposed building a geothermal power plant fifteen miles west of Upper Geyser Basin and “Old Faithful” Geyser in Yellowstone. The project was halted only because no one could demonstrate just where the exact boundaries of the Yellowstone geothermal reservoirs were. The nation is losing one of its romantic myths – the myth that people can live harmoniously with nature, which was illustrated in the landscapes, music and poems of American Romantics.

Working from the assigned reading “Exhibitions and Empire: National Parks and the Performance of Manifest Destiny,” engage students in a **class discussion activity** (30 minutes) that expands upon the ideas presented in the lecture, and through the paintings and music. For example, try the following approach.

1. When you originally assign this reading, ask students to pay particular attention to the important points in the article. Encourage them to underline these points and summarize them on the margins.
2. In class, divide students into small groups of ideally 3 students per group. Ask each group to prepare a list of the five most important points from the article.
3. After sufficient time, bring students back to a whole class format and ask groups to take turns to supply items from their lists to a common list. Write down the items on a board or overhead until a dozen get listed. (There should be some commonality among the group lists so 12 unique points might be a stretch.)
4. Ask students to study the common list and to determine that indeed the most important points from the article are listed.
5. Now ask students to return to their small group format. Have them study the common list and to, through discussion, select the most important three points. They should also be asked to prepare a “defense” behind their prioritized selections.
6. Back in the whole class format, have groups announce their selections. In order to have their selection so noted on the board they must offer a “defense” of it that the rest of the class agrees with. Circle the selected items on the common list on the board from those important points that received the most choices. Now you should have about 5 or 6 most important points remaining on the board.
7. Summarize the common list, with emphasis on students’ rationale of why these are the important points of the article.

The thesis of the article is that landscape can become an instrument of social power. Also, it points out that landscape, understood as a historically-specific invention, is integrally connected with imperialism. Thus, the goal of the **closing lecture** (10 minutes) is to tie the paintings, poetry and music of the Romantics with the ideas from the article, and to set the stage for a later class treatment of professional practice as presented in the assigned text chapter. Because assigned texts will be different from course to course, the closing lecture will necessarily have to be worked out by individual instructors. Nonetheless, the following is one possibility.

Let's begin by summarizing what we understand from the poets, painters and musicians of the early 19th Century. The attitude that made it possible to develop our national outdoor recreation resources (such as our national parks) was that portrayed by the poets, painters and composers of the Romantic era. Because of the era's emphasis on the aesthetic imagination about nature, decisions were made by the agencies of the time to preserve and hold the nation's most outstanding natural features for all to feel and experience. Today, however, this romantic legacy may be nothing more than a myth. Perhaps people cannot live harmoniously with nature as portrayed in the poems and landscape paintings and music of that time.

Now, how does this understanding link to the main points we've discussed from the reading "Exhibitions and Empire"? I think we've found some parallels. As you've pointed out from the group discussions and our class prioritizing, natural resources such as national parks can help to form a sense of individual and national identity through the regulation of vision. You have featured such identities as [repeat what remains from the list on the board].

For our next class meeting we will be working closely with Chapter 9 from our text. This chapter is about Physical Resource Management. As we study about such ecological considerations as the public and natural resource interface, direct and indirect approaches to ecological protection, and such principles of management as carrying capacity and limits of acceptable change (LAC) we are going to need to draw on what we've learned from not only the article we've just discussed, but also the painters, poet, and composer we've just explored.

Conclusion

Paintings, poetry, music and the other arts do not escape or withdraw from life, nor do they merely reflect life; more seriously they are life! No matter what direction we start off in, the sign posts of the humanities always keep pointing the same way – to a world where nothing is outside the human experience, including leisure. The most accomplished works are studied for what they reveal about human life. They open doors to the past, especially to the values and belief systems from which those artworks sprang. They also tell us about human attitudes and feelings, about ideas and ideals that continue to have value today.

A study of humanities as part of a leisure studies and recreation education curriculum involves more than an examination of the artistic monuments of civilizations past and present. Most importantly, it involves a consideration of how forms of human achievement in many times and places echo and reinforce, alter and modify, leisure expressions and services. This is the foremost reason for asking and answering questions about leisure through the humanities.

This paper advocates for the inclusion of the humanities in the recreation education classroom. Teaching about the founding of national parks in the United States, the ideas about nature and the nineteenth century human response to it that led up to a land stewardship ethic, might be better taught by artists, poets, and composers because they inspire. They appeal to more than our capacity for knowingness. For those committed to the understanding and study of leisure, there is abundant opportunity to read the lessons in fiction and poetry, to extract meanings from art, and to listen to the instructions in music. Leisure remains central to the humanities.

Certainly, teaching with the help of the humanities provides no definitive answers about the content of leisure studies, but at the least, we are prompted to ask interesting and perhaps even significant questions about leisure through the humanities. Or, at the very least, as Miriam Lahey in her 1991 article claimed, exploring leisure through the humanities is leisure itself.

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