

Walden Study Guide

Thoreau's *Walden* was written for a very specific audience. At its smallest, its intended audience is comprised of those Concord residents who had attended his lectures at the village lyceum and who had questions about the two years he had lived alone at Walden Pond. At its largest, this intended audience is a New England audience—an audience defined in some ways by a particular history, culture, and set of ideas. This is a New England in which a Puritan heritage, with a strong work ethic, focus on property, and belief in a strict set of religious rules, continues to play a part. But this is also the New England—particularly in Concord—of intellectual rebellion and radical thought.

Thoreau's paternal grandfather, Jean Thoreau, was a French immigrant who came to America in 1773, where he worked for Paul Revere and fought in the Revolutionary War. His maternal grandfather, Reverend Asa Dunbar, attended Harvard, where he was nearly expelled for leading a student protest about the quality of food. This was a New England of tradition, indeed. Thoreau himself would gain disapproval—though not official censure—while he himself was an undergraduate at Harvard, when he wore a green overcoat when all students were required to wear black. The administration, understanding that young Thoreau's limited financial resources prevented his purchase of another coat, refrained from admonishing him.

Thoreau himself was not so resigned when it came to expressing his opinions at Harvard, a school where most young Massachusetts men from respectable families studied. He was forced to take a leave of absence from the school in 1836 because he was ill, probably with tuberculosis. Unlike his literary contemporaries in England, members of the Romantic movement, Thoreau was not to take the view of this illness, commonly known as consumption, from which he would eventually die as a metaphor for the creative fires that burned in and consumed young the life of an artist. Thoreau returned to graduate with from Harvard with the Class of 1837. When offered a master's degree for only five dollars, with no requirement of study and the only condition being that he was alive three years later, Thoreau rejected and criticized the university's offer.

Another graduate of Harvard—both Harvard College and Harvard Divinity School—was Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau's Concord neighbor and one of his strongest literary influences. Emerson, while studying theology in the 1820s, became dissatisfied with the Unitarian religion, which had taken hold in Massachusetts. Gradually, he came to see Unitarianism as conservative and rationalist, a way for businessmen to engage in a religion that had become more of a social gathering than a connection with the divine. Founded in the United States in eighteenth-century within the Puritan Congregationalist Church, the Unitarian Church emphasized the oneness of God and preached that the divine could be perceived wholly through the five senses—through observation of the world and reading of others' observations in the Scriptures. In the early eighteenth century, the Unitarian and Congregationalist churches broke apart over doctrinal differences, including the Congregationalist emphasis on human sin and belief in the trinity. William Ellery Channing, a Boston minister, preached an address about Unitarian Christianity in 1819, crystallizing the Unitarian philosophy.

In his Divinity School address and in his book *Nature*, published in 1836, Emerson expressed what would become the tenets of the Transcendentalist movement. He and the

movement's other followers, the majority of whom were Unitarian ministers, formed the Transcendentalist Club. They believed that Unitarianism did not provide for every human being's need and ability to experience the divine. According to the Transcendentalists, God dwelt in the soul of every person a concept called immanence and the world was divided into the soul and nature. Believing that human beings should find truth within themselves, Emerson emphasizes self-reliance, in an essay of the same name, and understand God through reason.

Emerson's presence in Concord led to the development of the town as an intellectual center. Nathaniel Hawthorne and his wife lived for a time at the Old Manse, beginning on July 8, 1842, and Thoreau was known to dine with the couple as well as to plow and plant the Hawthornes' garden. The two remained close even after Hawthorne left Concord. Ellery Channing, son of William Ellery Channing, was another friend of Thoreau's. Channing suggested to Thoreau that he build a hut by Walden Pond, and after Thoreau's death, wrote the first biography of him, published in 1873. Other notable Concord residents of the time included Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, and Franklin Sanborn.

Thoreau's adoption of Transcendentalist beliefs was reflected in both his writing about nature as well as his political views. The Transcendentalists believed that though the world of the soul was paramount, it was necessary to recognize the truth and beauty of God's creation in the natural world. Thoreau took that one step farther, arguing in *Walden* that the divine exists not just in all people but can be perceived in all of nature. Furthermore, the idea of immanence served to strengthen Thoreau's belief in the equality of all people and support his abolitionist arguments. In "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau urged people to look into themselves, rather than to society, to provide them with values by which to live and to take it upon themselves to oppose injustice in society.

Published in 1854, *Walden* enjoyed a moderately successful first-run and continued its popularity into the 1870s. At that time, a series of unflattering biographies and harsh critical responses threatened to do away with *Walden*. Only in the 1890, when a favorable biography of Thoreau by Englishman Henry Salt sparked a resurgence in Thoreau's popularity, did *Walden* begin its ascent to the literary fame it now enjoys. New editions of Thoreau's work were published in 1893 and 1906. In the 1930s an increase of interest culminated in Henry Seidel Canby's 1939 biography of Thoreau. New editions of *Walden* and of Thoreau's other works have been published continually since then.

In 1941, the Thoreau Society was founded in Concord. Their mission is to honor Thoreau, stimulate interest in his writing, life, and times, and collect articles of memorabilia. The Thoreau Society, now located in Lincoln, Massachusetts, joined forces with Senators Ted Kennedy and Paul Tsongas, singer Don Henley, and a number of celebrities in the Walden Woods Project, formed in opposition to plans to develop the area around Walden Woods. The beach at Walden Pond and surrounding woods have long been at the center of an ongoing debate concerning use.

Thoreau's house, removed from its site in 1849, was excavated in the 1940s. Bronson Alcott, in his old age, had been marked the spot at which he remembered the house stood with a stone. Over the years, visitors have added stones of their own to the spot. A replica of the cabin,

based upon a sketch by Thoreau's sister Sophia and his description in *Walden* and his journals, stands near the park.

Walden Summary

In his first chapter, "Economy," Thoreau introduces his purpose in writing the book, saying he intends to answer questions people have asked about his reasons for living alone in a cabin in the woods near Walden Pond for two years. He explains that most people live their lives as if sleeping, blindly following the ways of their parents, and become trapped into these lives by owning property and slaving in jobs to maintain their way of life. In contrast, he sought to discover the true necessities of life and built a cabin, for the cost of \$28.12 _ near Walden Pond, where he lived for two years, beginning in the summer of 1845. Making a profit of \$8.71 _ by selling the beans he grew and working occasionally at odd jobs, he found he was able to support himself with very little work and much time for contemplation of himself and nature.

Thoreau, in the second chapter, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," talks about how he once considered buying the Hollowell farm for himself but the purchase fell through. Instead, he created a new existence for himself at Walden, where he found joy and fulfillment in nature, truly awakening in his mornings there, while most of society remains perpetually asleep, living mean lives when the possibility of a much better life is possible. The key to achieving such a life, he says, is simplicity. In the third chapter, "Reading," Thoreau describes how he derives enlightenment from reading Homer and other great writers, men who spoke of the truth and speak of life in terms too noble for most to understand. Most of society, however, is not content to strive after such truths and instead wastes their time reading popular fiction and newspapers, when they should instead be dedicated to improving the intellectual culture, making the village of Concord become a university.

However, as Thoreau relates in the fourth chapter, "Sounds," he spent his time during his first summer at Walden hoeing beans, rather than reading, or sitting all morning watching and listening to the birds. That reverie is broken by the whistle and rumble of the passing train, which reminds Thoreau of the destruction of nature and country life by progress and industrialization. In the evening, the hoots of the owls make him melancholy, reminding him of human cries of sorrow. In the fifth chapter, "Solitude," Thoreau feels so much a part of nature that he scoffs at the suggestion of one of his townsmen that he might be lonely at Walden. Instead, he relates his distaste at village life, where people see too much of each other, so that human interaction becomes trivial. In the sixth chapter, "Visitors," Thoreau is pleased that those who would bother him with trivial matters don't visit him at Walden. Instead, his visitors are Canadian woodcutters, whose straightforward thinking and love of life please Thoreau. Other visitors include half-wits from the almshouse, who Thoreau thinks are more intellectual than most overseers, and men of business, who no longer really enjoy nature. The happiest people to visit the pond are children and young women.

In chapter seven, "The Bean-field," Thoreau describes how he hoed and tended two acres of beans, some of which he sold, for a profit of \$8.71 _. Though passing farmers criticized him for not using a plow or fertilizer, having to work so long and hard made him grow close to the soil, truly enjoying his work rather than seeing it as a means of profit, like most farmers. The eighth chapter, "The Village," recounts Thoreau's discomfort in visiting town every few days,

where people's stares and thirst for gossip are invasive and where the attractions of pubs, stores, and shops are a temptation. He is always relieved to return home to his cabin but worries that society will seek one out wherever he goes. One day, he went to the village to go to the cobbler and was arrested for not paying taxes to a government which supports slavery. He spent a night in jail. (The experience would prompt Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience.")

Living in the woods, Thoreau devotes his time to experiencing nature, as he describes in chapter nine, "The Ponds" sometimes fishing with an elderly man who is hard-of-hearing and sometimes floating about in his boat playing his flute. He gives detailed descriptions of surrounding bodies of water Flint's Pond, White Pond, Goose Pond, and Fair-Haven Bay but finds Walden, with its pure clear water, to be the epitome of nature's offerings. In chapter ten, "Baker Farm," Thoreau describes a visit to go fishing at Baker Farm. When caught in a rain shower, he takes refuge in the hut of Irish "bogger" John Field and his family. Though he tries to convince Field that a simpler, easier life could be attained with far less work, Field cannot conceive of such a possibility. When the rain stops, he even does extra work to catch fewer fish than Thoreau.

In the book's eleventh chapter, "Higher Laws," Thoreau describes a feeling of animality that occasionally comes across him, making him want to devour a woodchuck raw. He sees in himself duelling impulses, to animality and to spirituality, and seeks to strengthen his spiritual self, refraining from hunting or eating meat. He hopes that boys who hunt will grow to be men who appreciate nature on spiritual level. Chapter twelve, "Brute Neighbors," opens with a dialogue between Hermit, who represents Thoreau's contemplative nature, and Poet, who tempts him to abandon his meditations and fish instead. He goes on to describe his animal neighbors, including friendly mice and partridges, as well as a war he witnessed between red and black ants and a loon who he followed around the pond in his boat but could never catch.

Chapter thirteen, "House-warming," begins Thoreau's description of the winter months. As the weather grows colder in October and November, he builds a chimney and plasters the inside of his walls. When the pond freezes, he studies the bottom of the lake and the formation of ice bubbles within the ice itself. In the fourteenth chapter, "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors," nature is all but silent and snow prevents Thoreau from venturing out much. He instead reflects on the former inhabitants of the woods, including former slaves, Cato Ingraham, Zilpha, and Brister and Fenda Freeman, and an Irishman Hugh Quoil. Only a few remnants of their houses chimney stones and covered wells remain. Sometimes Thoreau ventures out for walks, once seeing a seemingly-inactive owl who suddenly flies away, and returns home to find visitors, including a farmer, a poet, and a peddler-philosopher.

In chapter fifteen, "Winter Animals," Thoreau describes looking at the transformed landscape from the centers of lakes and seeing it in a new light and hearing animals, including owls and foxes chased by hounds. One day, he sees a rabbit which looks miserable to him until it leaps away, clearly a strong and worthy part of nature. In chapter sixteen, "The Pond in Winter," he awakens one morning after a night of questioning to realize that nature is serene and asks no questions. He cuts holes in the ice of Walden, measuring the depth of the pond, which some people have called bottomless. In January, Irish laborers working for a rich man arrive to cut and cart away the ice to sell. This upsets Thoreau, until he realizes people all over the world will have a taste of Walden. The lake soon refreezes. In chapter seventeen, "The Thaw," the lake

gradually begins to crack and groan and break apart. Thoreau describes in great detail the sand which breaks through the snow and flows like foliage down the banks of the railroad. The birds begin to return and the trees become greener. Soon, summer comes, and after two years at Walden, Thoreau leaves.

In his "Conclusion," Thoreau explains he left Walden because he had many more lives to live. He urges his readers to turn inward on immense spiritual journeys of self-discovery; to find fulfillment in nature rather than riches; and to avoid conformity and live his own life as he must. He concludes with the story of a bug which emerged from the wood of a table after sixty years and hopes that human beings will likewise awaken and emerge into a new life.

Walden Character List

Henry David Thoreau

The author of Walden, Thoreau is the book's narrator and its only main character. In 1845, at the age of twenty-eight, he built a cabin at Walden Pond in the woods of Concord, Massachusetts, and lived there for two years in an attempt to "live deliberately" and discover the essentials of life away from the distraction of village life. Educated at Harvard, he is a admirer of great literature, especially Homer, and has a wide knowledge of Eastern religions. A true nonconformist, he sees society and the "progress" of industrialization as destructive forces which keep people slumbering and unable to see and appreciate the true beauty of life. He finds companionship and inspiration in nature, exploring the relationship between humans, nature, and divinity. Though winter tests his spirits, the coming of spring rejuvenates his belief that he is a part of the ongoing life of nature. After two years, he leaves the pond, seeking new experiences and urging his readers to voyage into themselves to discover the truth.

James Collins

An Irishman who works for the Fitchburg Railroad. Thoreau buys his shanty from him and uses the boards to build his cabin at Walden. As he passes on the way to the house, he watches the Collins family with their possessions passing him on the road.

Mrs. C.

James Collins' wife, who shows Thoreau the shanty and assures him that the boards are good.

Seeley

An Irishman who, as someone later informs Thoreau, removed the staples, nails, and spikes from the Collins shanty to his own pocket, while Thoreau carts the wood to Walden, and stands by greeting him innocently.

Owner of the Hollowell place

A man who is about to sell his farm to Thoreau, who has already given him ten dollars, when his wife changes her mind. Thoreau lets him keep the ten dollars, deciding both of them are better off.

John Smith

A trader from Cuttingsville, Vermont, who is actually the product of Thoreau's imagination as he envisions where the hogsheads of molasses or brandy on the passing railroad are headed.

An old settler

The original proprietor of Walden Pond, believed to be dead, who stoned around the pond and fringed it with pine woods. Thoreau says he visits him in long winter evenings, implying he imagines encounters with this man, who may symbolize God as creator of the pond. They have long talks about old times and eternity. He is a beloved, though secret, friend to Thoreau.

An old dame

Another imagined inhabitant of Thoreau's neighborhood, she is invisible to most people. Thoreau strolls in her herb garden and listens to her fables, going back to the origins of mythology. She is hardy and will outlast all of her children, and seems to be metaphorically linked to nature.

A woodchopper

A French Canadian man about twenty-eight years old who has been working in the United States for a dozen years, hoping to save up money to buy his own home in Canada. He works chopping wood near Concord, bringing a stone bottle of coffee and the cold meat of a woodchuck, caught by his dog to eat for lunch. He has a "stout but sluggish body," dark bushy hair, and dull blue eyes. He can pronounce Greek and will read Homer with Thoreau, when he visits his cabin, but has no real intellectual curiosity. Instead he is a prime example of man's animal nature.

One older man

An excellent fisherman, skilled at woodcraft, who sometimes winds his fishing lines on Thoreau's doorstep. The two sometimes fish together, and as the old man has lost his hearing, they do not converse. Instead, he hums psalms, which Thoreau finds harmonizes well with his silent philosophizing.

John Field

An Irishman who lives with his wife and several children in a hut near Baker's Farm. He is an honest, hardworking, but shiftless man who works as a "bogger," digging up meadows and bogs for farmers. He came to America to have access to luxuries like milk, coffee, tea, and meat everyday, and Thoreau is unable to convince him that if he were to do without them and work less, he would need to spend less money on food and clothing and live more simply and comfortably. Thoreau shelters in his house during a rain storm, after which Field leaves off bogging for the afternoon and fishes, albeit unsuccessfully, with him. He is Thoreau's nearest neighbor. His name, which relates to his work, suggests he is an amalgamation of many poor working men whom Thoreau knew.

Mrs. Field

John Field's wife who hopes to improve her condition someday. Thoreau finds her brave to cook so many successive dinners in that same stove. She seems to be compelled by the possibility of a simpler, easier life which Thoreau suggests but ultimately unable to make the arithmetic work out and the idea become a reality.

Field's son

One of John Field's several children, his oldest son is a broad-faced boy who assists his father at his work as a bogger.

Field's infant

John Field's baby, a wrinkled, sybil-like cone-headed infant who seems unaware that he is "John Field's poor starveling brat" and not the last of a long line of nobility.

John Farmer

Another product of Thoreau's imagination or an amalgamation of many farmers, he sits in his door one September evening, thinking about work, until he hears the sound of a flute (Thoreau's), which awakens him and suggests the possibility of a glorious existence rather than a mean condition. The entire encounter is a metaphor for the effect Thoreau hopes his book will have on his reader.

Hermit

A projection of part of Thoreau's self in an imagined dialogue between Hermit and Poet. Hermit wants to sit and philosophize. He has nearly been resolved into the essence of things as he has ever been in his life when Poet interrupts him to go fishing. This represents the dialectical conflict between spiritual and animal natures.

Poet

In the dialogue with Hermit, Poet simply wants to look at the sky and go fishing. He represents the animal nature in man, in his interest in the material aspects of life, and perhaps disappointingly to Thoreau, it is he who overcomes Hermit in their conflict.

Mr. Gilian Baker

The owner of a "winged cat," who lives near the pond in Lincoln. The cat's wings are really long matted fur which grow during the winter.

Mrs. Baker

When Thoreau drops by to see the winged cat, the mistress of the house describes to him how she grows "wings" every winter and even gives him a pair of her old wings to keep. The cat, however, is out hunting, and he does not see her.

A poet

A friend who boards with Thoreau for a week during the time he is building his chimney, which leads him to sleep with his head upon the bricks for want of room. The two men work together building the chimney and cooking.

Cato Ingraham

A former inhabitant of the woods near Walden, who Thoreau thinks about during the winter months. Cato had been the slave of Duncan Ingraham, Esq. of Concord. Duncan built his slave a house, east of Thoreau's beanfield, and gave him permission to live in the woods. Cato, who was said to be a Guinea Negro, let a patch of walnuts grow up near his house to be used in his old age but a younger, whiter speculator got them. The cellar-hole of Cato's house still remains, though it is hidden by weeds.

Zilpha

A black woman who had a house where the corner of Thoreau's field is located. She spun linen for the townspeople and sang shrilly while doing it. British war prisoners on parole during the War of 1812 burned down her house, with her dog, cat, and chickens inside. Thoreau has seen bricks amid the oaks where her house was.

Brister Freeman

The former slave of Squire Cummings, whose house was on Brister's Hill, where his apple trees still grow. His gravestone, in the Lincoln cemetery, where he is buried near the unmarked graves of British soldiers from the Revolution, reads Sippio Brister, though Thoreau compares him to Roman general Scipio Africanus, and "a man of color."

Fenda Freeman

Wife of Brister Freeman, she was a hospitable woman who "told fortunes, yet pleasantly." Thoreau describes her as "large, round, and black, blacker than any of the children of night, such a dusky orb never rose on Concord before or since."

Stratten

A family whose homestead was near Brister's Hill. Their orchard covered the hill but was overgrown by pitch pines.

Breed

The name of a family whose house and tavern stood at the edge of the woods. The house stood empty for a dozen years until some boys from the village lit it on fire on an election night. Thoreau was one of the crowd who ran to fight the fire but it was decided to let the house burn. The next day, Thoreau encountered the only remaining member of the Breed family, who had come to look at the old house and found it burned.

Wyman

A potter who squatted with his family in the woods near the pond, never paying any taxes when the sheriff tried to collect. When a man who bought the potter's wheel from Wyman's son inquired of his whereabouts, Thoreau was glad to hear that such an ancient art had been practiced in his neighborhood.

Hugh Quoil

An Irishman, called Colonel Quoil, rumored to have been at Waterloo, who lived in Wyman's house and worked as a ditcher. A man of manners, afflicted with a trembling delirium, he wore a coat in the summer and had a carmine-colored face. He was found dead in the road soon after Thoreau moved to Walden and so he did not know him well, though he did visit the man's house when others worried it was unlucky.

A long-headed farmer

One of Thoreau's winter visitors, who walks through the snowy woods to his house to "have a social Ccrack" with whom Thoreau talks of simpler times.

A poet (2)

One of Thoreau's few winter visitors, he came the farthest and through the worst weather to Thoreau's house, at all hours. They spoke at length both in mirth and sober talk, making theories of life.

A philosopher

A visitor during Thoreau's last winter the pond. He is originally from Connecticut, he came through the village in snow and darkness and sees Thoreau's lamp through the trees. They have long philosophical talks during the winter evenings.

An old hunter

A man who swims in Walden in the summer and then visits Thoreau. He tells Thoreau of seeing a fox, pursued by distant hounds, stop and wait near Walden many years ago. He shot it and the hounds, curious, were surprised to find it dead.

Sam Nutting

The old hunter tells Thoreau about Nutting, who hunted bears on Fair-Haven Ledges and sold their skins for rum.

Ice-cutters

Men who come in January to cut the ice of Walden Pond and cart it away. They are Irish laborers with Yankee overseers, working for a man who already has \$500,000. Walden freezes over again and when the ice blocks left behind melt they return to the water of the pond.

Walden Themes

The slumbering of mankind and need for spiritual awakening

To Thoreau, the trappings of nineteenth century existence the cycle of tiring work to support property ownership forced the common man to live as if he were sleep-walking. Thoreau uses the idea of slumbering as a metaphor for mankind's propensity to live by routine, without considering the greater questions and meaning of existence. Therefore, Thoreau urges his readers to seek a spiritual awakening. He emphasizes the perspective he gains by awakening early and experiencing nature while others in the village are still sleeping and using the metaphor of awakening in the morning to demonstrate the difference between himself and his Concord townsmen. The spiritual awakening of Thoreau and his readers is reflected both in the times of day and in the seasons of the year, with the greatest self-awareness and spiritual discoveries occurring in the morning and spring.

Man as part of nature

Living in a society in which man in the form of railroads, factories, and other technical innovations had begun to tame and control nature, Thoreau counters the separation of man from society by conceiving of man as a part of nature. Through his life in the woods, living for the most part off the fruits of the land and deriving intellectual stimulation from plants and animals, Thoreau demonstrates that man can live successfully in the midst of nature. The animals give him companionship and accept him as a familiar part of their environment. Even nature itself is empathetic to him, for example waiting to blow its coldest winds after Thoreau builds his

chimney and plasters his walls. The assertion that man is part of nature promotes Thoreau's suggestion that most people who be more intellectually fulfilled and spiritually aware away from the smothering cocoons of city and village life.

The destructive force of industrial progress

Thoreau began his life at Walden, when the Industrial Revolution was in full force. Its impact upon life is best illustrated in Walden by the locomotive which passes daily by the pond, its whistles and rumbling contrasting with the natural sounds of the birds. Village life now runs at a faster pace, "railroad time," leaving even less time for the contemplation of self and nature which Thoreau desires. Such "progress" has a negative impact upon people's lives and upon the environment, the purity of which it pollutes and destroys.

The animal/spiritual dialectical struggle within man

Within himself and all men, Thoreau perceives two struggling natures one a wild, animal nature and the other a spiritual nature. It is this animal nature which occasions the impulse to catch and deliver a woodchuck raw and which he detects in its fullest form in the French-Canadian woodcutter. However, he seeks in himself and urges in his reader the perfection of the spiritual nature, through avoidance of meat and animalistic desires, and represents the struggle in himself through the imagined conversation between the Hermit (spiritual) and Poet (animal). Only within a few examples from the animal kingdom noble battling ants, the winged cat, and the loon can Thoreau see the animal and spiritual coexist peacefully.

Nature as reflection of human emotions

More than once, Thoreau describes Walden Pond as a mirror. Throughout the novel, the weather continually reflects his emotional state. His period of melancholy and doubt occurs during the winter when the pond is frozen and nature is silenced, and his joy and exultation is reflected in the thawing of the lake and growth of new life in the spring. The daily and seasonal variations in the pond and surrounding environment parallel the variety of and changes in Thoreau's intellectual musings. The idea of nature reflecting human emotion supports Thoreau's belief in man as a part of, rather than separate from or above, nature.

Spiritual rebirth reflected in nature and the seasons

Thoreau employs the repeated metaphor of rebirth throughout his book, as a means of convincing his readers to seek new perspective on themselves and the world. The cycle of the seasons, with the rebirth of the winter-dormant pond, animals, and plants in the spring, functions as the promise of an eventual spiritual rebirth in humans. Likewise, Thoreau's description of the hunter boy who grows to be a naturalist as a man and his metaphor of awakening from the slumber of life evince his hope and belief in the progress of human beings to a newer, greater understanding of themselves. He ends the book with a final metaphor of rebirth, describing the

bug which hatched out of a wooden table after decades, in the hope that some day, even if not immediately such a rebirth will occur within human society.

Discovery of the essential through a life of simplicity

In his first chapter, "Economy," Thoreau says that he went to the woods to describe what is truly necessary in life. Later, he says that he "went to the woods to live deliberately" so that when he died he would not find that he had never really lived. By ridding himself of the luxuries of society a big house, coffee, meat, even salt and yeast Thoreau discovers through his own "economy" what is really necessary to live a fulfilled life. His discovery of the relatively small amount of work needed to live in relative comfort leads him to attempt to convince his reader as well as John Field to similarly simplify their own lives and thus live more happily. For Thoreau, this is a happy discovery, for he comes to believe that one could be as happy in almshouse, with the same afternoon sun coming in the window as does in a rich person's house, as he would anywhere else. To his reader, Thoreau insists, "Simplicity! Simplicity! Simplicity!"

Exploring the interior of oneself

Thoreau omitted the subtitle of *Walden, or Life in the Woods* in its subsequent publications because he feared his readers would take it too literally. Though he was enthralled by the nature around him, Thoreau also went to the woods to consider himself. In his final chapter, he urges his reader, who may not be able to voyage to Africa or India, to instead explore within himself. He believes that there are uncharted depths within such as will continue to surprise and occupy anyone who explores within, but he perceives that such self-exploration is rare. He uses his own experience at Walden as an example for his reader and urges not social change but change on the level of the individual.

The Transcendentalist conception of nature as the embodiment of the divine

A follower of the Concord school of Transcendentalism and a good friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau expressed and clarified his own personal understanding of Transcendentalism in *Walden*. For him, the divine is most sublimely expressed in nature. He draws upon various Christian conceptions of the divine, as well as those from Eastern religions with which he is familiar, and recontextualizes them to create new meaning. For him, the role of God as creator of all of nature is most inspirational, and through this understanding, he expresses the Transcendentalist belief in existence of a spark of divinity in all men.

The state as unjust and corrupt controller of men's thoughts and actions

In sentiments that would be more fully expressed in his essay "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau recounts in *Walden* the story of his imprisonment in jail for not paying taxes to a government that supports slavery. Elsewhere in the book, as when aids a fugitive slave on his journey to Canada, Thoreau demonstrates his opposition to slavery and disgust with the Fugitive

Slave Law. He sees the state and its institutions as corrupt and insidious controllers of men, even when they try to escape it, as he does by living in the woods. On a more basic level, he sees the gossip of townspeople and the constant, artificial interactions demanded by village life as distracting from concentration on the true essentials of life.

Self Reliance and Other Essays Study Guide

Emerson lived and wrote in the days of Westward expansion, religious upheaval, and domestic and international political ferment.

He and his generation grew up during the War of 1812, the Annexation of Texas, the Gold Rush, the Civil War, and the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad. His generation developed a new patriotism, particularly after the War of 1812 when Boston was in constant fear of British invasion. Although the attack never came, many Americans came to share a sense of common life and identity, distinct from European history and customs. His writing reflects the national struggle to develop an American identity during this time, and indeed, many scholars consider his literary style as one of the first uniquely American (in contrast, see the writing of his contemporary, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who continued to champion a "European" style).

America was also going through a period of religious upheaval. By the mid-eighteenth century, several ministers in and around Boston began to reject the dominant Calvinist doctrine in favor of a more liberal and positive view of human nature, which placed individual piety and ethical behavior as central to salvation (rather than innate depravity and election to grace). The rejection culminated in not only the split of several of the oldest of the original Puritan churches in New England, but also the creation of the American Unitarian Association in 1825, which would in turn lay the intellectual groundwork for Emerson's Transcendentalist movement.

Finally, Emerson wrote during a time of political ferment, both internationally and domestically. Europe experienced a series of political revolutions in 1848, driven in part by demands for democracy, beginning with the French Revolution, and immediately spreading to most of Europe and parts of Latin America. In America, tension was building over both the economic inequalities created by the Industrial Revolution, and the continued existence of slavery in the South (which Emerson actively condemned).

Self Reliance and Other Essays Summary

Throughout his essays, Emerson is concerned with the fundamental relationship between humanity, nature, and God.

As the broadest overview of his ideas, *Nature* calls for a renewed spiritual relationship with the universe (or rather, God and nature, two sides of the same coin for him), unchained from

the past, based on personal experience and revelation. Such a relationship would allow individuals to become a "transparent eyeball," a conduit for God in nature. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson focuses on how the individual may achieve such a relationship with nature and God through self-reliance. To be self-reliant, individuals must avoid conformity and false consistency, follow their own instincts and ideas, and remain true to themselves. "Experience" explores the "lords of life," which confuse our experience of life and distract from the cultivation of our relationship with God. Emerson advises we turn to self-reliance to overcome these.

"The Over-Soul" in turn describes the nature of the Over-Soul/God (which unites and contains all souls) and the key role of revelation to connect with God. "The Poet" illustrates one such figure in touch with their soul and thus God, able to hear and set down the "primal warblings" of nature and provide humanity with truth and expression. Yet in a sense, as discussed in "Circles," all our lives are defined by a constant desire to connect with God, illustrated by our need to generate circles, a new way of thinking and acting godly in the world driven by the force of the individual soul. Hence, the severity of the errors of historical Christianity criticized by Emerson in the "Divinity School Address." Religion fails when it no longer provides a living relationship with and means of connection to God; hence the need for a new approach to our relationship with nature and God – that is, Transcendentalism.

Self Reliance and Other Essays Glossary

Art

If "nature" refers to the essences of the world unchanged by humans (e.g., the river, the air), then "art" refers to the application of human will to nature (e.g., a house, a statue, a picture). Note that Emerson wrote in a time before the human impact on the environment was fully understood.

Beauty

In *Nature*, Emerson reminds us that the ancient Greeks (e.g., Pythagoras) described the "world" (kosmos) as the embodiment of beauty (and order). Beauty arises from the primary forms of the world (e.g., the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal), and their features (e.g., outline, color, motion, grouping) are inherently pleasurable to the human eye. In other words, beauty arises from our connection with nature.

Calvinism

As maintained and defended by the Puritan settlers of New England, Calvinism, which dominated New England religious culture until the late 18th century, emphasized the inherent depravity of human nature, and the election by God of only select sinners for salvation. In this Christian theology, neither the actions nor character of the individual affected his/her eternal fate, but only the gift of grace that could be conferred upon by God. However, New England

Calvinism was also an evolving theology, and the Puritans introduced modified versions of the doctrine, such as the preparation of the soul for salvation.

Commodity

As discussed in *Nature*, Emerson understands commodities as one of the primary benefits of nature, in this case the raw materials and energies provided by nature for what we build, grow, and/or eat (i.e., the practical usefulness of nature). However, this only encompasses the most obvious and tangible of benefits of nature, which also include beauty, language, and discipline.

Correspondence

Correspondence refers to the connection between the mind (the inner world) and external nature (the outer world). In "The Poet," Emerson says, "The universe is the externalization of the soul." This omnipresent connection implied a monastically united universe where the physical and mental, the individual soul and oversoul/Reason/God, were two sides of the same coin.

Discipline

In *Nature*, Emerson understands nature as a discipline (among other things). Every property of matter (e.g., solidity, inertia, extension, figure) serves to educate us about 1) intellectual truths (e.g., about difference, likeness, order, the exercise of the Will/power) and 2) the nature of Reason (i.e., how the infinite variety of external forms of nature reflect and reference spiritual nature).

Experience

As described in "Experience," Emerson understood the term in its broadest sense as the sensations and states of mind in life unified by consciousness, which include both the mystical/spiritual and the sensuous/physical. In this way, experience is a bridge between the objective and the subjective, between nature and the soul. In the interactions between nature and the soul, the true meaning of life and reality are discovered.

Genius

Genius is the achievement of the self-reliant individual who believes in and lives by his/her own thought. However, such individuals demonstrate not just their own "wealth," but also the "common wealth" - that is, the genius is representative of the whole.

God

For Emerson, God is not the typical anthropomorphic God of historical and modern Christianity, but rather a universal soul (what he calls, "Reason" in *Nature*, and the "Over-Soul" in "Over-Soul") to which all of humanity and nature are connected, and from which the nature of Justice, Truth, Love, and Freedom emerge.

Historical Christianity

By "historical Christianity," Emerson meant organized and institutionalized Christianity, which he rejected most explicitly in the "Divinity School Address" as based on second-hand revelation and gospel. (Emerson never referred to the Bible as an authoritative source in his writing.) He instead favored a new theology based on the "moral sentiment" found in all human beings and religions, in which "God" could be found through actual, present, personal experience.

History - America

At the time when Emerson wrote, the history of America was considered superficial (i.e., without a substantial body of memorable events and cultural resources) compared with the history of Europe. (You may note, however, such a conception of "America" absented the history and culture of Native Americans, and specifically focused on the history of America after it was colonized by Europeans.) In the view of many of his countrymen, from the American Revolution to the 1830s, the history of America was the history of the westward movement of European people in the new world, of the application of European institutions, customs, and values to shape a new context and nature. Emerson rejected this perspective: he proposed that American history was the history of nature speaking through men (i.e., of their land as an expression of the soul in themselves based on correspondence), the discovery of a specifically American culture rooted in the nature of the new world, rather than of the history of European man domesticating nature in the new world according to old world (European) values and manners. His perspective influenced some of the major works of American literature, including *Moby Dick*, *Leaves of Grass*, and *Walden*, and helped to spur the development of an American school of philosophy by William James and John Dewey.

History - Individual

Emerson understood history not as a rule of cause-and-effect that determines the present (e.g., inheritance, family background), but rather as a set of circumstances and possibilities to be mastered by the individual in crafting his/her own destiny. People exist due to history (more specifically, their parents), but who/what they are is an open question.

Idealism

Idealism is a philosophy that proposes that reality is fundamentally a construction of the mind and thus immaterial. What is commonly referred to as the "real" is, to an Idealist, the "ideal" - the Idea or Soul whose appearance is merely a visible, imperfect expression. The ideal relates and unites the elements in the natural world to each other and humanity. While Emerson's idealism did not go so far as to deny the existence or reality of matter, he did emphasize the importance of the mind rather than matter, which led some critics to call him a "dualist" because of the limits of his idealism.

Language

In *Nature*, Emerson understands language as another use of Nature - in this case, as a vehicle of thought grounded in the natural world. He argues that 1) words are signs of natural facts (i.e., borrows from some material appearance, as evidenced in etymology - for example, "spirit" means wind and "supercilious" means the raising of the eyebrow), 2) natural facts are symbols of spiritual facts (i.e., every appearance in nature corresponds to a state of the mind, as with how we describe an enraged person as a lion, a cunning person as a fox, a lamb as innocence, lightness and darkness as knowledge and ignorance) and therefore concludes that 3) nature is a symbol of the spirit (i.e., the world is not simply significant because of the symbolic meaning we confer upon them, but are emblematic - nature is a metaphor for the human mind, as in proverbs like "a rolling stone gathers no moss" and "a bird in hand is worth two in the bush").

Nature

According to Emerson, nature (as opposed to grace, the state, the past/history, economics, race, sex, genetics, etc.) is the determining force and fundamental context of our lives. His definition of nature thus broadly includes: 1) a theory of the nature of things (i.e., the way things are, the underlying laws of the universe and the human mind), 2) a guide to life (including ethics, philosophy, art, language, and education), 3) an immediate physical experience of the world/God, and 4) everything that is not me/my soul/my consciousness (i.e., the external world, including flora and fauna in the environment, art, all other people, my own body).

Over-Soul

See entry for "God."

Reason

See entry for "God." Also, in *Nature*, Emerson distinguishes the understanding of intellectual truths (Understanding) from moral truths (Reason).

Religion

Emerson understood religion as the concrete, personal, and immediate feelings or experiences of the "moral sentiment" found in all human beings that provided insight into the perfection of the laws of the soul.

Science

Unlike the modern understanding of this term (i.e., as primarily referring to the natural and physical sciences), Emerson uses "science" to refer to both the natural/physical sciences and humanistic inquiry.

Self-Reliance

Elaborated upon in "Self-Reliance," the term refers to the chief virtue of the cultivated human who recognizes and lives by his/her inner genius (i.e., trusts his/her own thoughts) without being compromised by the influences and values of society.

Stoicism

Classical stoicism, as formulated by Zeno at the end of the fourth century BC and later elaborated upon by figures like Marcus Aurelius and Montaigne, was central to Emerson's thought. According to stoicism, nature - as opposed to tradition, authority, or the state - is the primary source of principles for an ethical life. To live in nature is to live in the present and to seize the day.

Transcendentalism

Initially an outgrowth of Unitarianism, Transcendentalism - as articulated and developed by Emerson (e.g., in *Nature*) and his followers, like Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller - emerged as 1) an ethical and religious reformist movement that rejected "historical Christianity" in favor of a more direct connection with a universal soul (i.e., God or Reason), an impersonal force that operated according to "the moral law," grounded in everyday experiences with nature in the present; 2) an aesthetic, literary, and philosophical treatise molded by ancient and modern influences, including Idealism, Stoicism, German and English Romanticism (e.g., Goethe, Wordsworth, Carlyle), Skepticism (e.g., Hume), Biblical criticism (e.g., Herder, Schleiermacher), Eastern religion and philosophy, and the mystical philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg; and 3) a social and political commentary that resisted established conventions (e.g., American slavery), sought modes of rethinking the relationship between humanity and the world, and engaged contemporary readers in the process of identity formation.

Understanding

In *Nature*, Emerson distinguishes the understanding of intellectual truths (Understanding) from moral truths (Reason).

Unitarianism

The American Unitarian Association was formed in 1825, as the culmination of a religious divide in New England between the then-dominant Calvinism, and the growing number of ministers in and around Boston who began to reject Calvinist doctrine for a more liberal and positive view of human nature by the mid-eighteenth century. Unitarianism differed from Calvinism in several ways, including: 1) Calvinism emphasized the inherent depravity of humanity and election by grace as central to salvation, whereas Unitarianism emphasized individual piety and ethical behavior as central to salvation; and 2) Calvinism worshiped "God in three persons" with a somewhat anthropomorphic God and divine Jesus, whereas Unitarianism

worshiped a single God and contended that Jesus was not divine but rather the perfect "Son of Man."

Self Reliance and Other Essays Themes

Individualism

Emerson emphasized the role and cultivation of the individual, whom he believed should avoid conformity and false consistency (i.e., consistency with our past actions and beliefs if they no longer fit the needs or desires of the present), and instead pursue his/her own instincts and ideas, to be self-reliant, even at the cost of being misunderstood by society.

Compatibility between Science and the Humanities

Give the focus of his essays on topics like poetry, philosophy, and religion, Emerson may appear primarily oriented toward the humanities, but he was also deeply interested in science throughout his life (e.g., geology, astronomy, chemistry, and particularly botany). Indeed, he believed there was no necessary divide between the humanities and science, as both, he argued, aimed to articulate a theory of nature.

Constant Revelation

In his writing, Emerson often described common, natural scenes found in his everyday life. For example, in *Nature*, he wrote, "Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear." Rather than mundane observations of his surroundings though, such examples served to illustrate the constant revelations he believed could be found in our embodied experiences of nature in the present moment (provided we are alert and open to their existence).

Process

Emerson understood nature to be in a state of continuous flux; that is, nature is a process, rather than a static object. Because this is the case with nature, it is also the case with life. For example, in "Circles," he argued life is based upon the perpetual propagation of circles, or worldviews, that emanate from the force or truth of the individual soul always moving toward (but never quite reaching) what we worship above us. As such, even morality and truth are never final and eternal, but rather always "initial." Indeed, to quote Emerson, "In the thought of to-morrow there is a power to upheave all thy creed, all the creeds, all the literatures of the nations, and marshal thee to heaven which no epic dream has yet depicted. Every man is not so much a workman in the world as he is a suggestion of that he should be. Men walk as prophecies of the next age."

The Fundamental Relationship with Nature

Emerson argued that nature is the fundamental source, context, and relationship for understanding our lives, based on the correspondence between the human mind/soul (the inner world) and external nature/oversoul/Reason/God (the outer world).

Transcendentalism

Beginning with *Nature*, Emerson's writing influenced the emergence and development of Transcendentalism as a movement (see Glossary entry on Transcendentalism for more details).

A New and Fundamentally American History

Emerson was a progressive force in reforming the European conception of American history. See Glossary entry on American history for more details.

Self-Reliance and Other Essays Summary and Analysis of Self-Reliance

Self-Reliance was first published in 1841 in his collection, *Essays: First Series*. However, scholars argue the underlying philosophy of his essay emerged in a sermon given in September 1830 - a month after his first marriage to Ellen (who died the following year of tuberculosis) - and in lectures on the philosophy of history given at Boston's Masonic Temple from 1836 to 1837.

The essay, for which Emerson is perhaps the most well known, contains the most thorough statement of Emerson's emphasis on the need for individuals to avoid conformity and false consistency, and instead follow their own instincts and ideas. The essay illustrates Emerson's finesse for synthesizing and translating classical philosophy (e.g., self-rule in Stoicism, the *Bildung* of Goethe, and the revolution of Kant) into accessible language, and for demonstrating its relevance to everyday life.

While Emerson does not formally do so, scholars conventionally organize *Self-Reliance* into three sections: the value of and barriers to self-reliance (paragraph 1-17), self-reliance and the individual (paragraph 18-32), and self-reliance and society (paragraph 33-50).

The Value of and Barriers to Self-Reliance (paragraph 1-17)

Emerson opens his essay with the assertion, "To believe in your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, - that is genius." His statement captures the essence of what he means by "self-reliance," namely the reliance upon one's own thoughts and ideas. He argues individuals, like Moses, Plato, and Milton, are held in the highest regard because they spoke what they thought. They did not rely on the words of others, books, or tradition. Unfortunately, few people today do so; instead, "he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his."

If we do not listen to our own mind, someone else will say what we think and feel, and "we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another." Emerson thus famously counsels

his reader to "Trust thyself." In other words, to accept one's destiny, "the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events." If such advice seems easier said than done, Emerson prompts his reader to recall the boldness of youth.

Their mind being whole, their eye is as yet unconquered, and when we look in their faces we are disconcerted. Infancy conforms to nobody; all conform to it; so that one babe commonly makes four or five out of the adults who prattle and play to it. So God has armed youth and puberty and manhood no less with its own piquancy and charm, and made it enviable and gracious and its claims not be put by, if it will stand by itself.

The difficulty of trusting our own mind lies in the conspiracy of society against the individual, for society valorizes conformity. As a youth, we act with independence and irresponsibility, and issue verdicts based on our genuine thought. We are unencumbered by thoughts about consequences or interests. However, as we grow older, society teaches us to curb our thoughts and actions, seek the approval of others, and concern ourselves with names, reputations, and customs. What some would call "maturity," Emerson would call "conformity."

To be a self-reliant individual then, one must return to the neutrality of youth, and be a nonconformist. For a nonconformist, "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it." Emerson does not advocate nonconformity for the sake of rebellion per se, but rather so the world may know you for who are, and so you may focus your time and efforts on reinforcing your character in your own terms.

However, the valorization of conformity by society is not the only barrier to self-reliance. According to Emerson, another barrier is the fear for our own consistency: "a reverence for our past act or word because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loth to disappoint them." Rather than act with a false consistency to a past memory, we must always live in the present. We must become, rather than simply be. Emerson famously argues, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." While acting without regard to consistency may lead to us being misunderstood, the self-reliant individual would be in good company. "Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood."

Self-Reliance and the Individual (paragraph 18-32)

In this section, Emerson expounds on how individuals can achieve self-reliance.

As mentioned earlier, to live self-reliantly with genuine thought and action, one must "trust thyself." In other words, one must trust in the nature and power of our inherent capacity for independence, what Emerson calls, "Spontaneity" or "Instinct" - the "essence of genius, of virtue,

and of life." This Spontaneity or Instinct is grounded in our Intuition, our inner knowledge, rather than "tuitions," the secondhand knowledge we learn from others. In turn, Emerson believed our Intuition emerged from the relationship between our soul and the divine spirit (i.e., God). To trust thyself means to also trust in God.

To do so is more difficult than it sounds. It is far easier to follow the footprints of others, to live according to some known or accustomed way. A self-reliant life "shall be wholly strange and new. It shall exclude example and experience. You take the way from man, not to man."

As such, one must live as courageously as a rose.

Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say, "I think," "I am," but instead quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence... But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.

To live in the present with nature and God, one must not worry about the past or future, compare oneself to others, or rely on words and thoughts not one's own.

Self-Reliance and Society (paragraph 33-50)

In the concluding paragraphs of *Self-Reliance*, Emerson argues self-reliance must be applied to all aspects of life, and illustrates how such an application would benefit society. "It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views."

In regard to religion, Emerson believes a lack of self-reliance has led prayers to become "a disease of the will" and creeds "a disease of the intellect." People pray to an external source for some foreign addition to their life, whereby prayer acts as a means to a private end, such as for a desired commodity. In this way, prayer has become a form of begging. However, prayer should be a way to contemplate life and unite with God (i.e., to trust thyself and also in God). Self-reliant individuals do not pray for something, but rather embody prayer (i.e., contemplation and unification with God) in all their actions. "The prayer of the farmer kneeling in his field to weed it, the prayer of the rower kneeling with the stroke of his oar, are true prayers heard throughout nature, though for cheap ends."

Emerson also believes true prayer involves an avoidance of regret and discontent, which indicate a personal "infirmity of will," as well as of sympathy for the suffering of others, which only

prolongs their own infirmity, and instead should be handled with truth and health to return them to their reason.

As for creeds, his critique focuses on how those who cling to creeds obey the beliefs of a powerful mind other than their own, rather than listen to how God speaks through their own minds. In this way, they disconnect with the universe, with God, because the creed becomes mistaken for the universe.

In regard to education, Emerson asserts the education system fosters a restless mind that causes people to travel away from themselves in hope of finding something greater than what they know or have. Educated Americans desire to travel to foreign places like Italy, England, and Egypt for amusement and culture. They build and decorate their houses with foreign taste, their minds to the Past and the Distant. Artists imitate the Doric or the Gothic model. Yet, Emerson reminds us, “They who made England, Italy, or Greece venerable in the imagination, did so by sticking fast where they were, like an axis of the earth.” One should not yearn for or imitate that which is foreign to oneself, for “Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life’s cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another you have only an extemporaneous half possession... Every great man is unique.” (Emerson develops these ideas further in his essay, *The American Scholar*, which calls for the creation of a uniquely American cultural identity distinct from European traditions.)

Finally, Emerson addresses the “spirit of society.” According to Emerson, “society never advances.” Civilization has not led to the improvement of society because with the acquisition of new arts and technologies comes the loss of old instincts. For example, “The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet... He has a fine Geneva watch, but he fails of the skill to tell the hour by the sun.” Society merely changes and shifts like a wave. While a “wave moves onward... the water which it is composed does not.” As such, people are no greater than they ever were, and should not smugly rest on the laurels of past artistic and scientific achievements. They must instead actively work to achieve self-reliance, which entails a return to oneself, and liberation from the shackles of the religious, learned, and civil institutions that create a debilitating reliance on property (i.e., things external from the self).

Emerson concludes, “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.”