



PREPARING to Read

from Walden

Essay by HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Connect to Your Life

Future Experiences What do you want to experience in your life? Think of some experiences you look forward to, such as working for the Peace Corps, learning to play the guitar, inventing a computer game, seeing the Rocky Mountains, or appearing on TV. Pick three of the experiences and explain to a small group of your classmates why you want to have each one.

Build Background

Thoreau's Experiment Like Ralph Waldo Emerson and other transcendentalists, Thoreau felt a need to confirm his unity with nature. On July 4, 1845, he began his famous experiment in what he thought of as "essential" living—living simply, studying the natural world, and seeking truth within himself. On land owned by Emerson near Concord, Massachusetts, Thoreau built a small cabin by Walden Pond and lived there for more than two years, writing and studying nature. *Walden*—a mixture of philosophy, autobiography, and meditation upon nature—is the record of Thoreau's experiences at the pond.

WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

subject	magnanimity	resignation
congenial	mean	rudiment
deliberately	misgiving	serenity
disreputable	perennial	sublime
disipation	perturbation	vulgar

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS NATURE WRITING The term **nature writing** describes a type of essay in which the writer uses firsthand observations to explore his or her relationship with the natural world. *Walden* is one of the best known examples of nature writing. Find out what Thoreau learns from his experiences with nature.

ACTIVE READING EVALUATING AUTHOR'S OBSERVATIONS Good readers look for connections between what they read and their own experiences. They also challenge the text, forming their own opinions about the writer's observations. As Emerson did in "Self-Reliance," Thoreau often uses aphorisms—brief statements that express general principles or truths about life—to convey his observations.

READER'S NOTEBOOK As you read, jot down some of Thoreau's aphorisms. Then, after you finish reading, write a brief evaluation of each aphorism, explaining whether or not you agree with it.



FROM

Walden

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

FROM

Where I Lived, and What I Lived For



When first I took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there, which, by accident, was on Independence day, or the fourth of July, 1845, my house

was not finished for winter, but was merely a defense against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough weather-stained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night. The upright white hewn studs and freshly planed door and window casings gave it a clean and airy look, especially in the morning, when its timbers were saturated with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude from them. . . .

I was seated by the shore of a small pond, about a mile and a half south of the village of Concord and somewhat higher than it, in the midst of an extensive wood between that town and Lincoln, and about two miles south of that our only field known to fame, Concord Battle Ground; but I was so low in the woods that the opposite shore, half a mile off, like the rest, covered with wood, was my most distant horizon. For the first week, whenever I looked out on the pond it impressed me like a tarn high up on the side of a mountain, its bottom far above the surface of other lakes, and, as the sun arose, I saw it throwing off its nightly clothing of mist, and here and there, by degrees, its soft ripples or its smooth reflecting surface was revealed, while the mists, like ghosts, were stealthily withdrawing in every direction into the woods, as at the breaking up of some nocturnal conventicle. The very dew seemed to hang upon the trees later into the day than usual, as on the sides of mountains. . . .

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have *somewhat hastily* concluded that it is the chief end of man here to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count

GUIDE FOR READING

22 **tarn**: a small mountain lake or pool.

27–28 **nocturnal conventicle** (kən-vən'tY-kəl): a secret religious meeting held at night.

30–42 **What are Thoreau's reasons for moving to the woods?**

35–36 **marrow**: the central, most essential part; literally, the soft tissue inside a bone.

36 **Spartan-like**: in a simple, economical, and disciplined way, like the inhabitants of the ancient Greek city-state of Sparta.

37 **cut a broad swath and shave close**: gather as much of the essence of life as possible.

45 **chief end of man here**: most important purpose of human life on earth.

47 **the fable**: a Greek myth in which Zeus changes ants into men.

48–49 **like pygmies . . . cranes**: a reference to a legend, mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*, about the continual battles fought by a race of dwarfs against cranes.

50 **evitable** (əv'Y-tə-bəl): avoidable.

53–54 **What is Thoreau's remedy for our hectic, detail-crowded lives?**

WORDS TO KNOW

deliberately (dY-lĭb'ər-Yt-lē) *adv.* in an unhurried and thoughtful manner
resignation (rēz'Yg-nā'shən) *n.* an acceptance of something as unavoidable
mean (mēn) *adj.* inferior in quality, value, or importance
sublime (sə-blĭm') *adj.* of high spiritual, moral, or intellectual worth; noble

half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumbnail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. . . .

65 Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry. Men say that a stitch in time saves nine, and so they take a thousand stitches today to save nine to-morrow. As for *work*, we haven't any of any consequence. We have the Saint Vitus' dance, and cannot possibly keep our heads still. If I should only give a few pulls at the parish bell-rope, as for a fire, that is, without setting the bell, there is hardly a man on his farm in the outskirts of Concord, notwithstanding that press of engagements which was his excuse so many times this morning, nor a boy, nor a woman, I might almost say, but would forsake all and follow that sound, not mainly to save property from the flames, but, if we will confess the truth, much more to see it burn, since burn it must, and we, be it known, did not set it on fire,—or to see it put out, and have a hand in it, if that is done as handsomely; 80 yes, even if it were the parish church itself. Hardly a man takes a half hour's nap after dinner, but when he wakes he holds up his head and asks, "What's the news?" as if the rest of mankind had stood his sentinels. Some give directions to be waked every half hour, doubtless for no other purpose; and then, to pay for it, they tell what they have dreamed. After a night's sleep the news is as indispensable as the breakfast. "Pray tell me any thing new that has happened to a man any where on this globe,"—and he reads it over his coffee and rolls, that a man has had his eyes gouged out this morning on the Wachito River; 90 never dreaming the while that he lives in the dark unfathomed mammoth cave of this world, and has but the rudiment of an eye himself.

For my part, I could easily do without the post-office. I think that there are very few important communications made through it. To speak critically, I never received more than one or two letters in my life—I wrote this some years ago—that were worth the postage. The penny-post is, commonly, an institution through which you seriously offer a man that penny for his

59 **founder**: to sink like a ship.

60–61 **dead reckoning**: guesswork. The term, used by sailors, describes a method of estimating a ship's position when the stars cannot be seen.

69 **Saint Vitus' (vī'tēs) dance**: a disorder of the nervous system, characterized by rapid, jerky, involuntary movements.

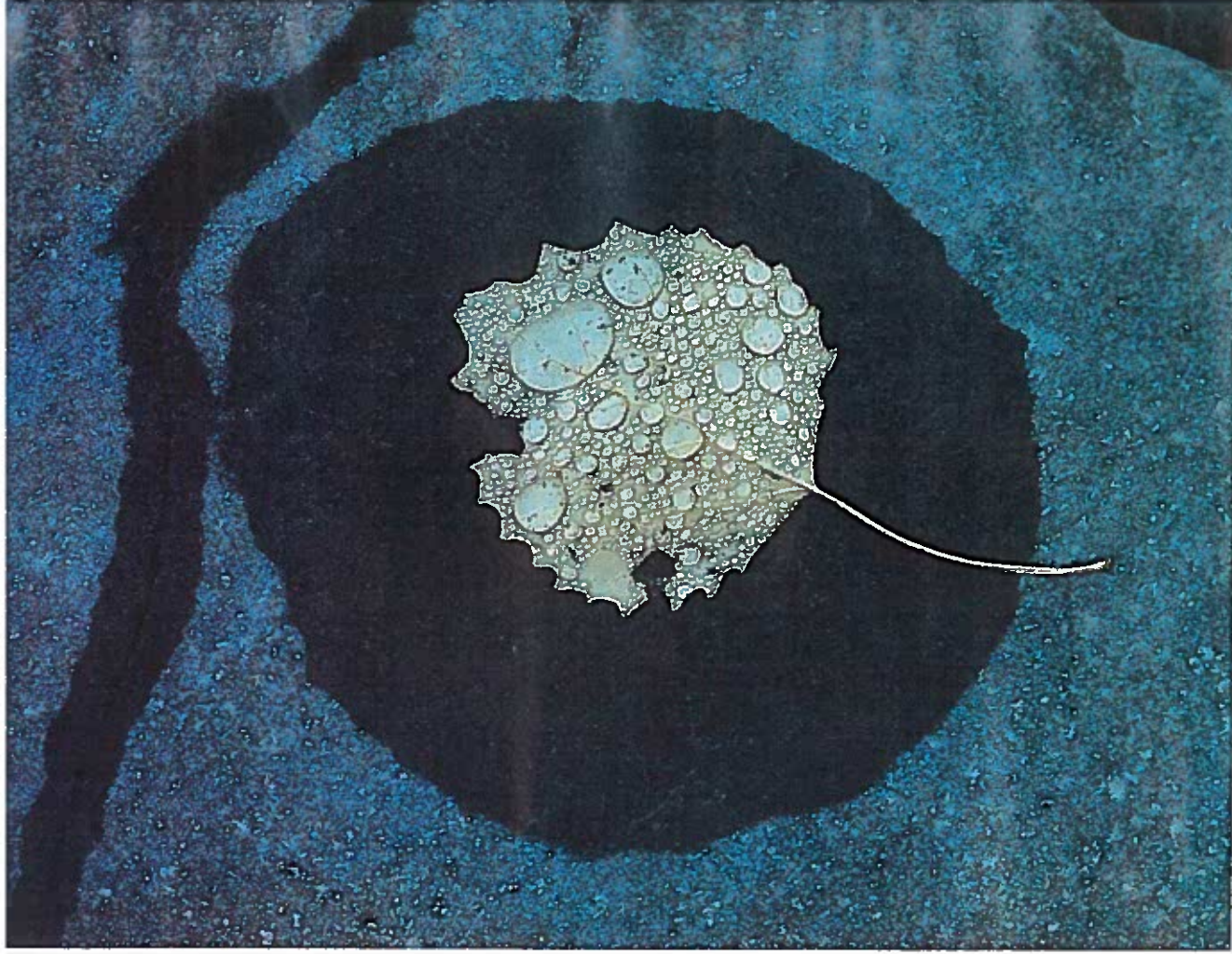
80–92 **What situation is Thoreau exaggerating here?**

89 **Wachito River**: a river (now called the Ouachita) in northern Louisiana and southern Arkansas. In Thoreau's time, it was believed that violent men went to that region to escape from the law.

97–99 Thoreau jokingly connects the postage rate (a penny per letter at the time) with the phrase "a penny for your thoughts." **What is the point of his joke?**

WORDS
TO
KNOW

rudiment (rōō'də-mənt) *n.* an imperfect or undeveloped form



by Ernst Haas. Copyright © Tony Stone Images

thoughts which is so often safely offered in jest. And I am sure that I never read any memorable news in a newspaper. If we read of one man robbed, or murdered, or killed by accident, or one house burned, or one vessel wrecked, or one steamboat blown up, or one cow run over on the Western Railroad, or one mad dog killed, or one lot of grasshoppers in the winter,—we never need read of another. One is enough. . . .

Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently and without perturbation; let company come and let company go, let the bells ring and the children cry,—determined to make a day of it. . . .

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it

112–126 Thoreau says that we do not have much time on earth. What does he say he wants to spend his time trying to understand? How does he feel that he can find some of the answers he seeks?

WORDS
TO
KNOW

perturbation (pür'ter-bä'shen) *n.* a disturbance of the emotions; agitation; uneasiness

115 is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would
drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars.
I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I
have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I
was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way
120 into the secret of things. I do not wish to be any more busy with
my hands than is necessary. My head is hands and feet. I feel all
my best faculties concentrated in it. My instinct tells me that my
head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their
snout and fore-paws, and with it I would mine and burrow my
125 way through these hills. I think that the richest vein is some-
where hereabouts; so by the divining rod and thin rising vapors
I judge; and here I will begin to mine.

125 **divining rod:** a forked stick that is believed to indicate the presence of underground water.

FROM *Solitude*



130 This is a delicious evening,
when the whole body is one
sense, and imbibes delight
through every pore. I go and
come with a strange liberty
in Nature, a part of herself.
135 As I walk along the stony
shore of the pond in my shirt
sleeves, though it is cool as
well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me,
all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs
trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whippoorwill is
borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with
140 the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my
breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled.
These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote
from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now
dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still
145 dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The
repose is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but
seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit, now roam
the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature's watch-
men,—links which connect the days of animated life. . . .

130–145 **What does Thoreau say he is part of, and why does he feel as he does?**

WORDS
TO
KNOW

congenial (kən-gēn'yəl) *adj.* suited to one's needs or nature; agreeable
serenity (sə-rēn'ī-tē) *n.* a mental and spiritual calm; tranquillity

Men frequently say to me, "I should think you would feel lonesome down there, and want to be nearer to folks, rainy and snowy days and nights especially." I am tempted to reply to such,—This whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in space. How far apart, think you, dwell the two most distant inhabitants of yonder star, the breadth of whose disk cannot be appreciated by our instruments? Why should I feel lonely? Is not our planet in the Milky Way? This which you put seems to me not to be the most important question. What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another. . . .

153–160 Thoreau suggests that because we are all in this life together, the physical distance between us is insignificant.

The Pond in Winter

Every winter the liquid and trembling surface of the pond, which was so sensitive to every breath, and reflected every light and shadow, becomes solid to the depth of a foot or a foot and a half, so that it will support the heaviest teams, and perchance the snow covers it to an equal depth, and it is not to be distinguished from any level field. Like the marmots in the surrounding hills, it closes its eye-lids and becomes dormant for three months or more. Standing on the snow-covered plain, as if in a pasture amid the hills, I cut my way first through a foot of snow, and then a foot of ice, and open a window under my feet, where, kneeling to drink, I look down into the quiet parlor of the fishes, pervaded by a softened light as through a window of ground glass, with its bright sanded floor the same as in summer; there a perennial waveless serenity reigns as in the amber twilight sky, corresponding to the cool and even temperament of the inhabitants. Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads. . . .

167 marmots: rodents that hibernate in the winter; groundhogs.



WORDS
TO
KNOW

perennial (pə-rén'ē-əl) *adj.* lasting through the year or through many years; enduring

FROM *Spring*

One attraction in coming to the woods to live was that I should have leisure and opportunity to see the spring come in. The ice in the pond at length begins to be honey-combed, and I can set my heel in it as I walk. Fogs and rains and warmer suns are gradually melting the snow; the days have grown sensibly longer; and I see how I shall get through the winter without adding to my woodpile, for large fires are no longer necessary. I am on the alert for the first signs of spring, to hear the chance note of some arriving bird, or the striped squirrel's chirp, for his stores must be now nearly exhausted, or see the woodchuck venture out of his winter quarters. . . .

The change from storm and winter to serene and mild weather, from dark and sluggish hours to bright and elastic ones, is a memorable crisis which all things proclaim. It is seemingly instantaneous at last. Suddenly an influx of light filled my house, though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with sleety rain. I looked out the window, and lo! where yesterday was cold gray ice there lay the transparent pond already calm and full of hope as in a summer evening, reflecting a summer evening sky in its bosom, though none was visible overhead, as if it had intelligence with some remote horizon. . . .

191 sensibly: noticeably.

200 crisis: turning point.

FROM *Conclusion*

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on

209–211 Why does Thoreau leave the woods?

220–223 On a sailing ship, passengers stayed in private compartments near the middle of the ship, while the crew shared living quarters at the front ("before the mast"). What is Thoreau comparing here? How does he want to live his life?



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the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now.

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them. . . .

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. It is not important that he should mature as soon as an appletree or an oak. Shall he turn his spring into summer? If the condition of things which we were made for is not yet, what were any reality which we can substitute? We will not be shipwrecked on a vain reality. Shall we with pains erect a heaven of blue glass over ourselves, though when it is done we shall be sure to gaze still at the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not? . . .

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poorhouse.

The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace. The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. May be they are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable. Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do not want society. If I were confined to a corner of a garret all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts about me. The philosopher said: "From an army of three divisions one can take away its general, and put it in disorder; from the man the most abject and vulgar one cannot take away his thought." Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to many influences to be played on; it is all dissipation. Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights. The shadows of poverty and meanness gather around us, "and lo! creation widens to our view." We are often reminded that if there were bestowed on us

239–242 This is one of the most famous passages in Thoreau's writings. The "different drummer" evolved from one of his journal entries describing an 1839 river voyage when he had fallen aslee to the sound of someone's beating a drum "alone in the silence and the dark." The phrase "marching to the beat of a different drummer" became popular in the nonconformist 1960s. [What does mean to hear a different drummer?](#)

255 almshouse: poorhouse.

255–260 [What similarities between poverty and wealth does Thoreau find? What benefits of poverty does Thoreau see?](#)

WORDS
TO
KNOW

misgiving (mī's-gīv'īng) *n.* a feeling of doubt, mistrust, or uncertainty
disreputable (dī's-rēp'yə-tə-bəl) *adj.* lacking respectability of character or behavior
abject (ăb'jĕkt') *adj.* low; contemptible; wretched
vulgar (vūl'gər) *adj.* coarse; common
dissipation (dī's'e-pā'shən) *n.* a reckless waste of resources; wastefulness



the wealth of Croesus, our aims must still be the same, and our means essentially the same. Moreover, if you are restricted in your range by poverty, if you cannot buy books and newspapers, for instance, you are but confined to the most significant and vital experiences; you are compelled to deal with the material which yields the

most sugar and the most starch. It is life near the bone where it is sweetest. You are defended from being a trifler. No man loses ever on a lower level by magnanimity on a higher. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul. . . .

The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this may be the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats. It was not always dry land where we dwell. I see far inland the banks which the stream anciently washed, before science began to record its freshets. Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts,—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this? Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of wood-ness in the dead dry life of society, deposited at first in the alburnum of the green and living tree, which has been gradually converted into the semblance of its well-seasoned tomb,—heard perchance gnawing out now for years by the astonished family of man, as they sat round the festive board,—may unexpectedly come forth from amidst society's most trivial and handselled furniture, to enjoy its perfect summer life at last!

I do not say that John or Jonathan will realize all this; but such is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star. ❖

WORDS
TO
KNOW

magnanimity (măg'nə-nīm'ĭ-tē) *n.* generosity

279 Croesus (krē'sēs): a king of Lydia (now part of Turkey) in the sixth century B.C. who became legendary for his great wealth.

299-317 What is the message of this famous parable of the "strong and beautiful bug"?

312 alburnum (ăl-bŭr'nəm): the part of a tree's trunk through which sap flows.

316 handselled: cheap; discounted; bought from a traveling salesman.

318 John or Jonathan: the common man. Thoreau's use of familiar given names here is similar to that in the expression "every Tom, Dick, and Harry."

Connect to the Literature

1. **What Do You Think?**
Would you like to live in a cabin in the woods as Thoreau did? Share your thoughts with a classmate.

Comprehension Check

- What does Thoreau advise people to do so that their lives will not be “frittered away by detail”?
- What is Thoreau's advice to the poor?

Think Critically

2. How would you explain Thoreau's reasons for leaving Walden Pond?

THINK ABOUT

- the meaning of the statement “I had several more lives to live”
- the parable of the bug in the apple-tree
- Thoreau's ideas about tradition, conformity, and success

3. What do you think is the most valuable lesson that Thoreau learned from his experience of living in the woods?
4. In these excerpts from *Walden*, Thoreau frequently discusses what is not important. What do you think *was* important to him?
5. **ACTIVE READING** **EVALUATING AUTHOR'S OBSERVATIONS**
Look over the aphorisms you copied into your **READER'S NOTEBOOK** and your evaluations of them. Which one comes closest to expressing one of your own views about life? Which one is most opposed to your views? Explain your answers.

Extend Interpretations

6. **The Writer's Style** Thoreau is fond of **paradoxes**, statements that seem to contradict themselves but are nevertheless true. For example, he writes, “I did not wish to live what was not life” (page 383) and “We are determined to be starved before we are hungry” (page 384). Tell what you think he means by each of these statements. What other paradoxes can you find in these excerpts?
7. **Comparing Texts** What connections do you see between the ideas expressed in *Walden* and those expressed in “Civil Disobedience” or Emerson's “Self-Reliance”?
8. **Connect to Life** Consider the experiences that you identified for the Connect to Your Life activity on page 381. How do your desires compare with Thoreau's wish to live simply and deliberately in the woods?

Literary Analysis

NATURE WRITING **Nature writing** is a term for a type of essay in which the writer uses firsthand observations to explore the mysteries of the human relationship with nature. According to Frank Stewart in *A Natural History of Nature Writing*, nature writers are “moved by the joyous, wild, and dazzling beauty in the world.” Thoreau, the father of American nature writing, was renowned for his understanding of nature's ways through patient, frequent, careful observations of his surroundings. He used richly poetic language to convey what he learned from his observations.

Cooperative Learning Activity Work with a small group to read aloud and discuss one or more passages from *Walden*, such as the excerpt “Solitude,” on pages 386–387. Then discuss Thoreau's observations of nature and his insights about life. Finally, list two or three words you would use to describe Thoreau's relationship with nature.

REVIEW **FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE** Thoreau was a poet as well as an essayist, and in *Walden* he used striking figurative language to express abstract concepts. Consider the **metaphor** “Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in.” Try to convey the same idea without using figurative language. Find other good examples of figurative language—**metaphor**, **simile**, and **personification**—in these excerpts from *Walden*.

Vocabulary in Action

EXERCISE A: CONTEXT CLUES Write the Word to Know that best completes the meaning of each sentence.

1. Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" is a _____ on the relationship between citizen and government.
2. Thoreau believes that government leaders sometimes find it _____ to do what is morally right.
3. Thoreau wants a society in which individual liberty would _____.
4. Thoreau says that Americans should _____ to change unjust laws.
5. Some might _____ that Thoreau wants a revolution.

EXERCISE B: SYNONYMS AND ANTONYMS For each pair of words, write S if the words are synonyms and A if they are antonyms.

1. blunder—error
2. conscientious—principled
3. multitude—individual
4. confront—encounter
5. unscrupulous—honorable

WORDS TO KNOW	blunder	endeavor	meditation
	conclude	flourish	multitude
	confront	inexpedient	unscrupulous
	conscientious		

Building Vocabulary

For an in-depth lesson on context clues, see page 326.



Henry David Thoreau

1817–1862

Other Works

Walden
A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers
The Collected Poems of Henry Thoreau

Philosopher and Scholar Henry David Thoreau was born and raised in Concord, Massachusetts, where he lived almost all of his life. He studied classics and natural history at Harvard University. After graduating at the age of 20, he returned to Concord to teach school. Although some of Thoreau's neighbors viewed him as a cranky eccentric, he was a careful observer and a deep thinker, who recorded his thoughts and observations in his journal. Taking to heart the ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau tried to live by his own values rather than society's values, which he considered materialistic.

Dedicated Nonconformist Thoreau's life was full of examples of his independent spirit. As a Harvard student, he was required to wear a black coat but sported a green one instead. In his first year of teaching, he refused to punish his students

physically and resigned his post. In 1845, he conducted his famous experiment, living simply and frugally in a small cabin that he had built himself on the shores of Walden Pond. In 1846, he was arrested and spent a night in jail for refusing to pay a poll tax.

Social Reformer Despite his love of solitude and country life, Thoreau took an active part in social causes. During the 1840s and 1850s, he became passionately involved in the abolitionist movement. He lectured at antislavery rallies and served as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, hiding fugitive slaves in his family's house. Although he did not advocate violence, he publicly defended John Brown, the fiery abolitionist who had led a bloody raid on Harpers Ferry.

Posthumous Praise During his lifetime, Thoreau published only two books, both of which sold poorly. In the years since his death, however, his reputation has grown tremendously. His observations about nature, the importance of the individual, and the value of a simple life are more and more relevant today, as environmental abuses multiply, the pressure to conform increases, and the pace of life continues to speed up.