



PRESTWICK HOUSE

Activity Pack

TRANSCENDENTALISM:

ESSENTIAL ESSAYS OF EMERSON AND THOREAU

BY RALPH WALDO EMERSON &
HENRY DAVID THOREAU



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Item No. 303052

Written by Marleena Young & Sally Wein

Name: _____

Date: _____

Self-Reliance**Essay Writing**

Objectives: Identifying key concepts within the text
Writing an essay

Activity

Emerson makes many bold statements throughout his essay, "Self-Reliance." He strives to warn readers against conformity. In Emerson's opinion, the goal of every individual should be to stand away from the crowd and to be one's own self-reliant person. Emerson states, "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." The concepts of nonconformity and self-reliance are key to understanding Emerson's main ideas in this essay.

Pick three statements in "Self-Reliance" that appeal the most to you, and write an essay of several paragraphs about the significance of these statements. Remember, Emerson wrote his essay to inspire people to follow their own path. When you write yours, try to draw on Emerson's purpose.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Friendship**Theme**

Objectives: Identifying theme in the essay
Making connections within the text

Activity

In his essay "Friendship," Emerson discusses the values of friends and the need to stand apart from our friends. Emerson believed that in every instance an individual has to follow his or her own inclinations first. However, Emerson still saw the value of having friends and companions. He states, "Friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed."

From this statement it can be determined that Emerson greatly valued his relationship with his friends. Working in groups, compose a list of what friendship means to you, and share this list with the class.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Civil Disobedience

Classroom Poll

Objectives: Understanding main concepts
Making connections within the text

Activity

In his essay "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau makes many statements concerning the American government. The reader can view these statements as either positive or negative. At the time Thoreau wrote this essay, slavery and the Mexican-American war were big political issues. The government supported both slavery and the war, and Thoreau disagreed with the government on both issues.

Conduct a class discussion to review Thoreau's ideas about society and discuss the current issues in our society. Compare and contrast the information. Then take a class poll to determine who agrees and disagrees with Thoreau's ideas. Once the poll has been tallied, conduct another class discussion to review the results.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Walden: Where I Lived and What I Lived For**Map Making**

Objective: Using details from the text to draw a map

Activity

After considering different living arrangements, Thoreau decided to settle in the woods at Walden Pond. Thoreau's stay at Walden Pond was meant to be a type of experiment, and he details his experiences at his cabin throughout his book, *Walden*. The woodland where Thoreau settled was owned by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who encouraged Thoreau's endeavors.

Divide into small groups. Each group will create a map of Walden based on the descriptions that Thoreau provides. The map should have a key, and each group should provide a brief explanation for its project. Be creative, and try to make your map as colorful and detailed as possible.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Walden: The Village**Connecting to Society**

Objective: Connecting the text to today's society

Activity

In the beginning of the section entitled "The Village," Thoreau describes going into the village of busy men to "observe their habits." While he is in town, he describes the different stores and homes that he comes across. Thoreau says that these stores and homes have a type of allure. However, Thoreau viewed the different comforts and amenities of society as insignificant when compared to the glory of nature. Thoreau says that he "escaped wonderfully from these dangers, either by proceeding at once boldly and without deliberation to the goal...or by keeping [his] thoughts on high things."

Write a description of what would happen if Thoreau had wandered into your school instead of the village. What would he have observed? What would he have thought about what he was observing?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Walden: The Ponds

Myth Writing

Objective: Writing a myth based on textual material

Activity

In this section, Thoreau discusses the origin of Walden Pond. The story Thoreau relates has been told to him by the older members of his community. According to legend, Native Americans were having a gathering on the hill where Walden Pond is now located. During the course of their meeting, the Native Americans spoke profanely, and from this affront to nature the hill began to shake and sink. When the hill sunk into the ground, all the Native Americans were killed except for one elderly woman who managed to escape. This woman was named Walden, and the pond that sprung up from the sunken hill was named in her honor.

After rereading this myth in Thoreau's text, come up with your own myth of how the pond was formed. Your myth must be an original idea. Remember, this is a creative activity, and no myth can be wrong. In addition, remember to title the myth.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Walden: Higher Laws

Creating a Menu

Objective: Developing a menu based on information from the text

Activity

Thoreau's ideas regarding the means in which man provides food for himself are addressed in this section. Thoreau mentions eating fish and the food that he grows, but also says that he will go "ranging" the woods in search of meat. Thoreau claims "I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both." The higher law that Thoreau discusses is staying away from the meat of the woodland animals, but the primitive side of Thoreau wanted to devour the animals on sight.

Form small groups, and make a menu of what a daily diet would consist of for Thoreau. Use quotes from this section to support the items listed on your menu. In addition, incorporate pictures or illustrations into your project. The menu should contain a variety of choices for each course and be as descriptive as possible.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Walden: Conclusion**Letter Writing**

Objective: Demonstrating comprehension through letter writing

Activity

After spending one year at the cabin, (actually two years but Thoreau shortened the time in his narrative to better fit the book,) Thoreau was ready to go back to society. Thoreau stated, "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." While it is clear in this section that Thoreau planned to re-enter society, he by no means planned to live by the rules set by society.

Imagine that you are Thoreau and are finishing your time at the cabin. Write a letter to Emerson, and tell him what you have learned from your time spent living there. Remember, even though Thoreau claimed that he left the woods for a good reason, he still learned much from his experiment. Incorporate these lessons into the letter by citing information from the text of Walden.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up

Writing a Speech

Objective: Writing a speech that presents the authors' ideas

Activity

Imagine that you are the president of your school's student government. It was your job to convince Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau to speak at your school assembly today, but neither one of them appeared. Now it is up to you and your vice president to present a two-part presentation using the ideas of both men.

With a partner, write an outline that will represent the thoughts and beliefs of both of these Transcendentalists so the student body will understand the concepts and be able to ask questions later. Then, write a brief speech that adheres to the outline. One of you can write the speech for Emerson and the other can write one for Thoreau. You may also choose to work on both speeches together. After you and your partner complete the speeches, present them to the class.

Your understanding of the concept of Transcendentalism will aid you in establishing the method in which you present the information to the students. Be careful not to voice your own beliefs regarding whether you agree or disagree with Emerson's and Thoreau's ideas. Begin with an introduction, moving to each side of the platform as you assume the role of each speaker. Your personal understanding of the doctrine will aid you in establishing a route to explaining Transcendentalism to the students. Be careful not to voice your own beliefs and whether or not you agree with Emerson or Thoreau. We started the outline for you.

A. Introduction

1. "Good afternoon. I am Ralph Waldo Emerson."
2. "Good afternoon, students. I am Henry David Thoreau."

B.