

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**Walden; or, Life in the Woods**

by Henry David Thoreau

Copyright © 2002 by Prestwick House Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938. 1-800-932-4593.  
www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her  
personal use. This material, in whole or part, may not be copied for resale. Revised June 2006.

ISBN 978-1-60389-961-1

Item No. 202360

# Walden

## Notes

In his world-renowned classic, Henry David Thoreau penned some of the most often quoted sentiments in American writing. His premise was simply to record a journal of his daily thoughts and philosophical theories about the world around him. Thus, he built a cabin in the woods on Ralph Waldo Emerson's property near Concord, Massachusetts and lived in the simplest of solitary means for two years.

During these two years, Thoreau recorded his ruminations on every subject from the clothing a man wears to why he lives. His writing style belies a deeper philosophical inquiry about the world surrounding him and an acute understanding of human nature.

Note: All quotations and page numbers come from the Dover Thrift edition of *Walden; Or, Life In The Woods*, Copyright 1995 (New York).

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, students will be able to:*

1. give an example of an allusion to a mythological or historical figure in *Walden*.
2. identify a still-existing social problem which *Walden* describes.
3. dispute ideas that *Walden* espouses and explain their own opinions.
4. write a journal essay in “Thoreau-esqe” style.
5. choose which of Thoreau’s essays is their favorite and explain why they identify with it.
6. give an example of metaphor in reference to an inanimate object.
7. give an example of animal personification.
8. agree or disagree that most people live lives of quiet desperation and explain why.
9. chose a quote from the concluding essay and give an example of its application to life today.
10. define and cite examples of the following terms:
  - allusion
  - figurative language
  - allegory
  - parable
  - personification
  - simile
  - imagery
  - theme
  - metaphor
  - anthropomorphism

### Questions for Essay or Discussion

1. Write a short essay in which you discuss the central theme of this entire work. What point is Thoreau trying to make?
2. Give examples of three metaphors in the book and state whether they are effective at conveying the image Thoreau is trying to convey.
3. Give three examples of personification where Thoreau attributes life-like qualities to other objects.
4. How would you describe Thoreau's beliefs about various world religions such as Christianity and Hinduism? He seems to be well read. Does he subscribe to any of these world religions, or is he merely a skeptic?
5. How would you describe Thoreau's political beliefs? Would he be characterized as a liberal or as a conservative today?
6. Discuss whether you think you could live alone with few possessions and work for food as Thoreau did. Do you think it would make you a better person if you could do it? How would it do that?
7. Did reading Walden give you a new respect for the people who lived and worked in that era? What aspects of life then were better than life today?
8. Choose one sentence from the Conclusion and give an example of something in your life that supports the truth of the sentence.
9. Dispute something that Thoreau says is false and explain your reasoning.
10. Do you like Thoreau as a person? If he were alive today, would you care to be his friend, and why or why not?

**obscurities** – things that are vague and distant  
**observatory** – a place where nature may be viewed and studied  
**obtrude** – to push out  
**palatable** – appetizing  
**penance** – an act done to show sorrow over committing a sin  
**perchance** – perhaps; maybe  
**praetors** – ancient roman magistrates  
**precedents** – acts that justify later acts of the same kind  
**profess** – state openly  
**progenitors** – ancestors  
**resignation** – the act of giving oneself over, without resistance, to hopelessness or despair  
**reverencing** – treating with honor or respect  
**sinecure** – paying job requiring no work  
**slough** – shed  
**subdue** – to bring under control  
**superfluously** – exceeding what is necessary  
**superintend** – to have charge over; to direct or to manage  
**trifling** – not important  
**valiant** – brave  
**vigilant** – alertly watchful

1. Why do you think Thoreau singles out individual groups of readers as he begins his first essay?

---

---

---

---

---

2. What does Thoreau mean when he says that the “mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation?” Is this still true today?

---

---

---

---

---

3. What does Thoreau’s story about the Indian basket weaver illustrate about his views on capitalism?

---

---

---

---

---

**Essay 1: Economy: Philanthropy**

VOCABULARY

**beggarly** – inadequate; marked by poverty  
**benevolence** – kindness, charity  
**carrion** – dead and decaying flesh  
**constitution** – physical makeup  
**contagion** – a contagious disease  
**crudity** – rawness, lack of refinement  
**dyspepsia** – indigestion  
**enumerating** – counting  
**firmament** – the sky; the heavens  
**hitherto** – up until now  
**intemperate** – in a manner that shows lack of moderation, especially in drinking  
**irrepressible** – impossible to control  
**microcosm** – an individual or community which is a miniature world or a miniature universe  
**nape** – the back of the neck  
**pedantic** – like a person who is a showoff when it comes to his level of knowledge  
**persevere** – to continue on, despite all obstacles  
**philanthropy** – goodwill towards all people  
**pious** – devout  
**trig** – stylish  
**trumpery** – nonsense  
**umbrageous** – resentment causing  
**wafted** – moved as if by a breeze  
**transitory** – temporary

- 1. How does Thoreau feel about philanthropy, and why does he choose not to participate in it?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Essay 11: Higher Laws

### VOCABULARY

**fowling** – hunting wild fowl  
**intangible** – incapable of being touched or held  
**moiling** – working hard  
**omnipresent** – present in all places at all times  
**ornithology** – the study of birds  
**reproof** – blame for a fault  
**repugnance** – strong dislike or distaste  
**scullion** – kitchen helper  
**squeamish** – nauseated  
**tenure** – a period of holding something  
**wantonly** – mercilessly

1. How does Thoreau describe his “higher law?”

---

---

---

---

---

2. What is the difference between English boys and the “Yankees”?

---

---

---

---

---

3. Thoreau uses a very interesting analogy of worms within a healthy person’s body to describe the fallen nature of man. What does he say about the fallen nature of man?

---

---

---

---

---

4. What happens to John Farmer as he sits on his porch?

---

---

---

---

---

**Essay 17: Spring**

## VOCABULARY

**atoning** – making amends  
**befell** – happened  
**debauched** – corrupted  
**epitome** – embodiment  
**expeditious** – acting with efficiency  
**fetters** – chains or shackles  
**globule** – a tiny ball of liquid  
**hummock** – a rounded mound of earth; a knoll  
**imbricated** – overlapped at the edges  
**inert** – powerless to move  
**influx** – a coming in  
**oscillation** – the act of swinging back and forth  
**pirouetting** – whirling around  
**precursors** – forerunners  
**rectitude** – virtue, morality  
**resounded** – reverberated  
**rivulets** – small streams  
**stalactites** – hanging mineral deposits in cave  
**suppliant** – a petitioner  
**transient** – short-lived  
**tumult** – uproar  
**untenable** – incapable of being held or maintained

1. What is Thoreau referring to when he writes about the “grotesque vegetation”?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---