The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail Study Guide

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail by Jerome Lawrence

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Contents

Introduction

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail, by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, was first published in New York in 1971, during the Vietnam War. The play, which was a clear protest against the war, used a related incident from America's history to comment on the current war. In 1846, the writer, Henry David Thoreau, spent a night in jail for not paying his taxes. Thoreau refused to pay money that would support the war that was currently being waged against Mexico. This incident later provided the basis for Thoreau's popular essay, "Civil Disobedience." Lawrence and Lee's immensely popular play, which was deliberately produced in regional theaters as opposed to on or off Broadway, struck a chord with Vietnamera audiences. In fact, the play was so relevant to the times that it was temporarily shut down shortly after its first performances in 1970, when another anti Vietnam protest—at Kent State University—resulted in the death of several students.

Despite the lack of critical commentary, the play continues to be one of the most popular works by Lawrence and Lee, a writing team that enjoyed a fifty-two-year collaboration, and who also wrote the immensely popular play, *Inherit the Wind*. In *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, time and setting are shifted between each episodic scene without indication or explanation, forcing the audience or reader to pay close attention. These dream-like effects serve to highlight the main themes of the play—rebelling against authority and expressing one's individuality—universal themes that have appealed to many audiences, both nationally and internationally, since the play's first production.

*The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*was published in a reissue edition in 1992, which is available from Bantam Books.

Author Biography

Jerome Lawrence was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on July 14, 1915. Robert E. Lee was born in Elyria, Ohio, on October 15, 1918. Although both men grew up in the same region of Ohio, attended Ohio universities, and worked in commercial radio, they did not meet each other until 1942, when they met in New York and immediately became writing partners with their production of *Inside a Kid's Head*, a radio play. The two men, who had already lived somewhat parallel lives, continued this trend when they both entered the armed forces that summer. They both served in the war until 1945, and together, they co-founded the Armed Forces Radio Service (1942), where they created and produced radio programs.

Following World War II, Lawrence and Lee continued to concentrate mainly on writing, producing, and directing scripts for radio shows, including *The Frank Sinatra Show* and *The Railroad Hour.* In 1955, when the advent of television reduced the amount of radio-show programming, they produced their first stage production, *Inherit the Wind*. The play, which has proved to be their most successful work, also introduced a technique that Lawrence and Lee would use in most of their plays—staging an historical incident to comment on a current situation. In the case of *Inherit the Wind*, the dramatized incident was the famous Scopes trial of 1925, in which a high-school biology teacher was put on trial for attempting to teach evolution. The play was an obvious commentary on the Communist trials instigated by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s, just as *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* (1971), their second most successful work, was an obvious commentary on the war in Vietnam.

Lawrence and Lee produced several more plays together from the 1970s until the 1990s, during which time they were recognized by many regional and national awards within the dramatic community. In 1990, they were both named to the Theatre Hall of Fame. Three years later, in 1993, Lawrence's Malibu home was destroyed by the fires that were raging through California. Although many of his personal literary and art collections were lost, he was able to escape with the latest draft of *Whisper in the Mind* (1994), the last play that Lawrence and Lee produced in their fifty-two-year collaboration. Lee died on July 8, 1994, in Los Angeles, California, shortly before the publication of *The Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee*, their final collaborative work. Lawrence currently lives in Malibu, California.

Plot Summary

Act 1

*The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*takes place in Concord, Massachusetts and the surrounding area. As the stage directions note, "time and space are awash here." The play starts in one time period, and then abruptly shifts around to many other times and places. At all times throughout the play, Henry David Thoreau's jail cell can be seen in the background. The play starts at its latest point in time, during a Concord winter when Ralph Waldo Emerson is an old man, walking with his wife, Lydian. With his wife's help, Waldo remembers the name of Henry (Thoreau), who was his best friend. With this realization, the action shifts to Henry's jail cell, when the writer is a young man.

Henry's mother asks Henry why he is in jail, and he gives vague answers, a tactic that he uses throughout the play. Henry shows what his mother calls his strangeness, by questioning the order of the alphabet. Henry's brother, John, comes into the jail cell and their mother leaves. The location shifts to a sunny field at an earlier time, when Henry has just returned from Harvard. Henry and John talk about Henry's education, which Henry counts as worthless, except for hearing the lectures of Waldo, whom he says he wants to emulate. Back in the jail cell, Henry talks with his cellmate, Bailey, who has been accused of burning down a barn; Bailey has been waiting for his trial for three months, a fact that outrages Henry.

Henry tries to talk to Bailey about conformity, but Bailey is not an educated man. Henry teaches Bailey how to spell his name, then grabs a chair from the jail cell and moves to the front of the stage, shifting back in time to when he was a teacher. He is interrupted by Deacon Nehemiah Ball, the Chairman of the Concord School Committee, who criticizes Henry's deviations from the approved school textbooks. Henry gets into a theological argument with Ball, who is outraged at Henry's transcendentalist beliefs, and Henry provokes the class to laugh at Ball. John later tells Henry he should apologize to save his job, which Henry does. However, although Ball excuses him, he forces Henry to whip six of his students for laughing. Henry reluctantly does this, then quits teaching, just as Waldo quits his position as Unitarian pastor, in another time-space shift.

Henry proposes to John that they start their own unconventional school, which they do. Henry and John stand in a meadow teaching a number of students, including Ellen, a beautiful young woman who is much older than the class. Henry criticizes Ellen for trying to take notes, a method used in conventional schooling. The action shifts back to the jail cell, where Bailey has successfully learned how to write his own name. Henry encourages Bailey to unlearn it and remain uneducated. Henry pushes the jail cell's locker box to the front of the stage, where it becomes a boat by a pond. John tells Henry their school is losing all of its students. John leaves, and Ellen enters. Henry uses the opportunity to invite her for a boat ride, during which he tries to explain his transcendentalist views to her and profess his love to her; both attempts are unsuccessful, and Henry suggests that Ellen go to church with John.

Back in the jail cell again, Henry proclaims to the sleeping Bailey that they are freer in prison than the outside community, who must conform. At the front of the stage, a crowd of churchgoers files out of the church, Ellen on the arm of John. Although Lydian attempts to mask Waldo's satirical comments, it is clear from Waldo's conversation with Deacon Ball that Waldo is critical of organized religion. This belief is underscored by the appearance of Henry, who, to the dismay of his mother and Ball, is working on Sunday. Later, Henry and John talk about Ellen's refusal to marry John. John dies from blood poisoning, cutting himself with a dirty razor.

The action shifts back to the day when Henry hires on as Waldo's handyman and tutor for Edmund, Waldo's son. This is the beginning of the friendship between the two men. Waldo insists on paying Henry, but Henry will not take money, and instead asks for the future use of a portion of Waldo's wooded estate, Walden, for an experiment. Waldo also asks for Henry's occasional help in polishing his speeches. Back in the jail cell, Henry and Bailey talk about Walden, where he remains secluded from civilization, except when he has to go into town for supplies. The action shifts, and Henry walks into town to get his shoe fixed. Constable Sam Staples comes up to Henry and serves him with a bill for unpaid taxes. Henry refuses to pay, since he does not support the way the tax money is being spent. Sam reluctantly takes Henry to jail. Waldo gets a note saying that Henry is in jail and goes to see him. Sam pleads with Henry to pay his tax, but Henry, cryptic no longer, finally explains that he is not paying his tax because it is going to pay for the war against Mexico, which he does not support. The act ends with Waldo asking Henry what he is doing in jail, while Henry asks what Waldo is doing out of jail, implying that Waldo should be protesting in jail with Henry.

Act 2

Lydian sends Edward with Henry to go huckleberry hunting. Edward says he wishes Henry was his father, a sentiment he later repeats to his mother. Lydian suggests that Henry should get married, and he says nature is his chosen bride. Back in the jail cell, Bailey asks Henry to be his lawyer, but Henry refuses. The action shifts to Walden Woods, where Henry feeds an escaped slave, Henry Williams, on his way to Canada. The time shifts ahead, and Henry and Waldo argue about the fact that Waldo is not protesting the release of slaves like Williams, who has been shot. Henry accuses Waldo of not practicing what he preaches, and encourages Waldo, who has much more influence than Henry, to speak out against slavery and the war. Waldo hesitantly agrees, and Henry rushes off, ringing the town bell and announcing that Waldo is going to make a speech. Lydian comes up and tells Henry that Waldo is not coming, that he has chosen to think over the matter and write a carefully worded essay describing his position. The crowd disperses. Henry tries to get their attention again, but this time, the bell makes no sound.

Back in his jail cell, Henry is in the grips of a nightmare. The Mexican war rages around his sleeping body, and all of the major characters in the play are in the battle. Edward Emerson is a drummer boy, Sam Staples is a sergeant, Bailey is a soldier, Ball is the general, and Waldo is the president. Henry tries to talk to Waldo, but no sound comes

out. When Ball asks Waldo for instructions, he says that he needs to collect his thoughts. Williams appears as a Mexican soldier. Edward is wounded, but Waldo ignores this fact, saying he needs more time to think, and write a carefully worded essay. The unseen voice of then-Congressman Abraham Lincoln advocates stopping the war. John comes on the scene in a soldier's uniform and gets killed.

Back in the jail cell, Henry wakes up from his nightmare, and finds Sam is there with breakfast. He also tells Henry that somebody paid his tax for him, and that he is free to go. Henry is outraged and forces Sam to tell him that it was his Aunt Louisa who did it. Henry leaves the cell, telling Bailey that he is leaving Walden, because he has to stop hiding in the woods and take a more active stand against society's injustices.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

The play starts with the stage set with a jail cell in the center of the stage. The two cots in the cell are occupied by sleeping men. Aside from this jail cell set the rest of the stage is bare and will be changed throughout the play with minor props and lighting that will be used to suggest shifts in time and location. The play is set in Concord, Massachusetts.

The first lighting cue has moonlight falling on the sleeping form of Henry (Henry David Thoreau), while the other prisoner is in shadow. The lighting on the empty areas of the set is weak to suggest winter. An old man enters with his wife. The man is Ralph Waldo Emerson (Waldo), and his wife is Lydian. As they walk on stage, Waldo is trying to recall the name of a friend of his. Lydian suggests the name he is look for is Henry, and Waldo suggests David.

In another area of the stage, Henry's mother is visibly upset and asks him what he has done. Henry sits up on his cot and explains that he has actually "not done something." She is shocked, and yells offstage to someone named Louisa that "David Henry" had not done something. Henry corrects her, and she calls him strange. At this point Waldo speaks again and says that he almost understood the strange Henry.

Henry and his mother keep talking, and she tells him she does not know whom he is. He replies that he is himself, and the two discuss the fact that he has not been baptized and that he did not cry at his christening. Waldo interjects that Henry was strange, sad, and happy, and that he worked on Sundays. Waldo, who is clearly quite old, is losing his senses, as he then mistakes his umbrella for a person. Henry's mother then upbraids him for actively trying to do things backwards. Henry replies that he likes the way the alphabet sounds and feels when read backwards, and that things should be mixed up to make the alphabet less linear and more human.

The lighting on Waldo's side of the stage shifts to a stronger hue, and a younger Waldo is seen giving a lecture. He urges his audience to "cast conformity behind you." Henry sits cross-legged and repeats Waldo's words like a mantra. His mother and brother John then discuss the fact that Henry does not do what society expects of him. John attributes this to Henry's Harvard education, and his mother reacts violently to hearing the name.

She leaves the stage, and John and Henry begin a discussion under lighting that is described as summer-like and warm. The stage directions suggest that they are in a field. Henry tells John that college was a waste of time except for Waldo's lectures. He explains how Waldo's theory of the "Universal Mind" unites all of humanity and nature. The two joke about their Aunt Louisa, and Henry says that he wants to be "as much as possible like Ralph Waldo Emerson."

The scene shifts to Waldo and Lydian. They are discussing one of Waldo's lectures, and Waldo is filled with doubts about his performance and the way in which it was received. Lydian reassures him that he did a good job and that his students were concentrating hard on his words.

The audience's attention then goes back to the jail cell, where Henry is seen waking up his snoring cellmate, Bailey. He tries to talk to Bailey about freedom and philosophy, but Bailey turns out to be uneducated. Bailey asks what Henry has done, and Henry replies that he has not committed the murder of Mexico. Bailey does not understand, and Henry explains how the president has gone to war without the approval of Congress. He adds that he does not approve of the war either and refuses to support it.

Bailey tells Henry that he has been waiting in jail for three months for a trial on the charge of burning down a barn. Henry is outraged on his behalf, but Bailey tells him that he just wants to "get along" without fighting the system. Henry points out that just doing what is expected can suffocate you, asking where God might be if he had done, what everyone wanted. Bailey protests against Henry's likening his barn burning to a protest against injustice, fearing that he will be put in jail. Henry points out that he is already in jail, and then wonders if he will have to wait three months for his trial.

Bailey admires Henry's intellect, and confesses his illiteracy. Henry teaches him how to read and write his name using a variety of mnemonic techniques. Bailey is impressed and observes that Henry must be a teacher. There is another shift in lighting, and Henry moves the chair in the prison cell to the front of the stage and assumes the role of a schoolteacher.

Henry then proceeds to lecture the audience on particles as though they were students. He is interrupted by Deacon Ball, the Chair of the Concord School Committee, who questions his teaching methods. Henry points to a student named Potter in the first row of the audience who has asked about the existence of God. Ball is shocked at what Henry has been discussing with his class, and says that matters of theology should be left to religious leaders. Henry begins to introduce Waldo's concept of the Universal Mind.

At this point, we see Waldo in academic robes on another part of the stage. He is lecturing on the Universal Mind and his words reinforce and compliment Henry. Ball becomes highly agitated, and takes Henry to task for not using "proscribed" (which actually means forbidden) textbooks. Henry seizes on his wrong word choice, prompting some students to laugh. Ball tells Henry to stick to the textbooks, and Henry continues to mock him by telling his students to prevent all their senses from experiencing life so that they can all focus solely on the books.

Ball threatens to report Henry to the School Committee. John then appears and urges Henry to apologize to Ball so that he can continue teaching. Henry does so, and Ball forgives him. He insists that Henry flog his students. We see Henry flogging six imaginary students, visibly struggling with his disgust. Ball congratulates him, and notes

that he can report that Henry has done the expected. Henry interrupts and notes that he will not teach anymore, and we see Waldo resigning as a Unitarian Minister.

The attention then shifts to John and Mother, who note the similarities between Waldo and Henrys' speeches. John tries to cheer his brother up by telling him that schools do not need curriculum or direction. Henry is inspired, and proposes they start their own school. Next, we see Henry and John in a meadow. Henry has a straw hat and while addressing a crowd of unseen students, John holds a telescope. Henry is pointing out species of flower and grass to his students.

Henry soon waxes poetic on the possibility of obscurity. He notices a girl who is much older than the rest of the class and is taking notes. Henry notes that she should not be writing down what he is saying. She offers to leave, since she has not paid tuition, but both Henry and John urge her to stay. Henry is busily pointing out different species of grass when he discovers a species he has not seen in the area. He catches Ellen writing notes once again, and urges her to be an individual. John tells him not to shout at the girl, and Henry then urges all his students not to emulate him but to savor their sensations of the world.

Henry returns to his jail cell, where Bailey is happily practicing writing his name. Henry is suddenly disgusted and urges him to remain uneducated so that he will not write books. Bailey is delighted to be in jail with an author. Henry notes that people must find books instead of the other way around, and rues the fact that his recently published book did not sell well.

The next mini scene sees Henry and John carrying the clothing box from the cell to the front of the stage. It becomes clear that the box is a boat. John tells Henry that enrolment in their school has declined, so that they now have only one student left. Ellen appears after John leaves. Henry invites her for a boat ride, and she tells him that her father has withdrawn her little brother Edmund from the school because he does not approve of Transcendentalism. However, it becomes clear that neither Ellen nor her father really understand Transcendentalism.

During the boat ride, Henry attempts to explain Transcendentalism to Ellen. He laments the fact that humanity has done so much damage to the environment. He notes that it is good that men do not know how to fly, because if they did they would damage and dirty the clouds and the air. He adds that Transcendentalism is a person's thoughts or emotions that transcend or rise above their external perceptions. He invites her to go beyond "living" and start "being." He adds in a jumbled way that she is beautiful – he is clearly becoming romantically interested.

Ellen is flattered, and says that she finds Transcendentalism to be "nice" rather than wicked. She explains how her brother and father had fought over Transcendentalism at the dinner table. Henry notes that older people like her father are "polluted" by advice, and strongly urges Ellen to maintain her "innocence" by thinking for herself. She notes that she has to go home, and Henry delays. He finally tells her that he loves her, and

she continues to ask him to take her ashore. We briefly see John and Mother discussing their happiness that Henry is in love with a girl.

Henry, however, has been rebuffed by Ellen. He agrees to take her to shore if she will go to church with John, noting that John liked her very much. Ellen asks what will happen to the school now that there are no students. Henry says he will be the student and will learn from nature. His intensity frightens Ellen away, and he is visibly frustrated with himself.

Henry then returns to the cell and asks Bailey about marriage. Bailey gives a derisive snort, and Henry points out that not many men seem to care for marriage. He then notes that he can feel the sound waves from the clock tower, and that he is freer in a jail cell than are the people outside.

The lighting on the jail cell fades, and new lighting emulates a stained glass window. We see a row of people worshipping at a church and singing a hymn ("Blessed be the Tie that Binds"). The crowd includes Ball, Waldo, Lydian, Edward (Waldo's son), Mother, Sam Staples (the constable who put Henry in Jail), John, and Ellen. As the hymn ends, we see Edward scratch his bottom until Lydian stops him. Ball asks Waldo about listening to another clergyman, and Waldo replies that he is always glad when the sermon is over.

As the crowd moves out of the church area, Henry rolls a wheelbarrow up to them. Ball tells Henry that they have been feeding their souls, and Henry replies he has been feeding plants with manure. Ball notes that it is a sin to work on Sundays, and John notes that Henry worships in nature. Waldo questions the purpose of churches, and tells Ball that Henry is declaring his independence every day. Mother again laments Henry's strangeness, and hopes that John will turn out not to be strange as well.

The lighting shifts again to the field, where we see Henry celebrating Ellen agreeing to marry John. John quickly tells him that she is not marrying him because her father objects, and that she wishes Henry would have proposed so that she could refuse him also. John notes that she would marry both of them, and the two briefly discuss polygamy. They then discuss how only their father and mother are married; all others in the family are spinsters or bachelors. They then agree that they will remain celibate until they are 90 and 92 years old, at which time they will both pursue Ellen.

The lights go dark and church bells ring. The lights rise to the church set, and the Unitarian Minister eulogizes John. Mother asks Henry to pray with her, but Henry says that he cannot. Mother urges him to pray for John's soul, and Henry says that he cannot pray to a God that does not listen. Ellen approaches Henry, offers her condolences, and asks for details of John's death. Henry is sarcastic towards her, and explains how John died of blood poisoning from a dirty razor. Henry becomes agitated and questions God as to his motives in taking John. Ellen is sympathetic, and asks Henry if God gives pain so that humans can transcend it. Henry is seized with a new feeling of love for her because she actually understands Transcendentalism, but does not hug her out of a sense of propriety.

The scene shifts to Waldo's study, where Henry is applying for work as a repairperson because he wants to stop thinking. Lydian suggests that he could be a guide and teacher for Edward. Henry offers to be a tutor, and Waldo agrees. When Waldo offers money, Henry notes that he has already been paid by being able to listen to his mentor's lectures. Henry compares Waldo to a Roman emperor giving away gold coins, and Waldo notes that these emperors "were trying to buy popularity." Waldo tells him to stop thinking, and notes to Lydian that it will be interesting having a Harvard-educated repairperson. The group then agrees they will call each other Lydian, Henry, Waldo, and Edward.

Edward then enters, being introduced to Henry. He is cautious about meeting his new tutor, and we are told that he prefers his mother to his more intellectual father. Edward leaves, and Henry offers to work for 10 cents a week. He tells Waldo that without a salary, he will be free of obligations, but Waldo insists he must be paid. Henry then proposes to work for a piece of Waldo's property in the woods, so that he can conduct an "experiment."

Waldo congratulates him for planning his retirement. Henry objects to the whole notion of retirement, noting that people work during the best part of their lives so they can relax during their declining years. Waldo tells the story of a man who went to India to earn a fortune so he could retire and be a poet. The man died with a huge fortune, says Waldo, and no poems.

Waldo agrees to give Henry his piece of the woods, and then asks Lydian to make a list of things for Henry to do. Henry cuts him off, saying that the things that need doing will tell him about it. Waldo is happy to hear that he will not be bothered with details, and adds that he may come to Henry for ideas on things he is writing. Henry exits, and Waldo and Lydian discuss his strange nature briefly.

The scene shifts back to Thoreau's jail cell, where he and Bailey discuss time zones after Bailey asks for the time. Henry compares time to a river, noting that you cannot count the water as it flows by. He suggests swimming instead, and when Bailey says he cannot swim Henry tells him not to struggle with the water.

The two then go to the window of the cell and watch a drunk stagger around outside. They discuss drinking, and Henry notes that he drinks the air and gets drunk from nature. He tells Bailey that he lives in the woods by a pond. The lighting shifts to a subtle green like a forest, and a flute can be heard. Henry describes his little patch of forest by Walden Pond. Bailey is amazed, and Henry tells him that he stays there all the time except for trips to town for supplies.

Henry takes off one shoe, and the scene shifts to the main street of town. Townsfolk look strangely at Henry, but he ignores them. Ball confronts him, and Henry rebuffs him. Sam Staples then approaches Henry and tells him he must pay his property taxes. Henry uses the tax bill to cover the hole in his shoe. Sam notes that he does not like having to serve Henry with the bill, and Henry urges him to quit as constable. The two argue some more, and Sam offers to lend Henry the money to pay his taxes.

Henry objects violently, and notes that he will not pay his taxes because the government is corrupt. Sam tells him it is the law, and Ball urges him to arrest Henry. Henry agrees, and says that if more people were willing to go to jail to protest the government they could effect change on the scale of the American Revolution. The crowd argues that he is breaking the law and revolting against the government. Henry says that he will not give money to the government because he does not approve of its actions. Sam tells him that Waldo has paid his taxes, but Henry states firmly that he will not support the president. Sam reluctantly leads Henry to jail.

Sam and Henry enter the cell, and Sam asks Henry questions on a form. When he asks Henry what his occupation is, Henry answers with several of the different jobs he has done. Sam is not ready to deal with Henry's attitude and marks him as a carpenter.

The scene shifts to Waldo's house, where Lydian brings Waldo a note telling of Henry's arrest. Waldo is glib about the arrest, suggesting that Henry committed a mercy killing by murdering the tiresome Ball. Lydian hands him the note, and the lights go up on Henry's mother. She is upset, noting that her nightmare of Henry being arrested has come true.

The lights shift to the cell once more, and Sam urges Henry to pay his taxes. Henry refuses. We then see Waldo preparing to go to the jail in the middle of the night to see Henry. Sam again urges Henry to pay, and Henry tells him he will not pay for the war in Mexico because to do so would make him a murdered. Sam leaves the keys and Henry returns them to him. Waldo enters from the back of the theatre, asking why Henry has gone to jail. The act closes with Henry asking Waldo why he has is not in jail.

Act 1 Analysis

The first act of Lawrence and Lees' play develops the characters and themes that made it one of the most controversial and successful plays of the late 1960s. The character of Henry is depicted in the play as a solitary revolutionary, who uses techniques of passive resistance to protest against injustice. The events of the first act develop Henry as an individualist who believes deeply in personal freedom, which is one of the most important themes of the play.

Henry begins the play imprisoned even though an imprisonment that he freely chooses. The audience is not fully aware of why he has chosen to be in jail, and though the reason is hinted at, it is not directly exposed until the end of the act. This gives the audience the chance to get to know Henry and understand just what has led him to take this extraordinary step. Henry displays several important character traits in the first act, and each of these builds the audience's impression of him as a free spirit with strong views on many different subjects.

One of the most important elements of Henry's character is his irreverent sense of humor. Humor is especially important in the early parts of the play because it gets the

audience interested in the story. It also moves the story along by allowing Henry to introduce complex ideas without bogging down in lectures.

One of the first examples of Henry's humor comes when he jokes with his mother about the order of the alphabet. While this may seem like just an example of a precocious son joking with his mother, it allows the reader (or the audience) to see right from the beginning of the play that Henry does not accept concepts that society agrees on as absolute truths. Instead, he is willing to challenge systems and beliefs with new concepts.

Henry continues using humor to challenge systems when he meets with his brother John. After four years at Harvard, he notes that he does not have a diploma because "They charge you a dollar. And I wouldn't pay it." He later says that his whole education was "droning and snorting," compared to Waldo's lectures, and that he will start thinking now, which will be "a change from college." While firing off quips that make both the audience and John laugh, Henry dismisses his entire education and announces that he will follow Transcendentalism.

When Henry interacts with Bailey, we can see that his humor is not always appreciated or understood, just as his beliefs are often not understood. He pokes fun at Bailey for his snoring and then gets philosophical when Bailey claims not to be awake, but Bailey does not see either the humor or the depth of Henry's thoughts. While this scene advances the plot by revealing details about Henry's life, it also allows Lawrence and Lee to show the audience how Henry was misunderstood; Bailey's lack of understanding thus becomes a symbol of the way Henry's teachings were often misunderstood or ridiculed by traditionalists during his lifetime.

As the act progresses, Henry's use of humor becomes less about wit and more about bitter social or political commentary. When Ball comes to observe Henry's class, Henry deliberately provokes his students' laughter to mock him for his rigid adherence to curriculum. While Henry's joking is designed to solicit laughter, it also demonstrates his belief that people can learn things from all of their senses. It also shows that Henry is not afraid to stand up to authority.

Henry's belief in freedom is the second major character trait he exhibits in the first act. He is never afraid to deviate from what society decrees is the norm, and is always willing to assert his own point of view. His rift with the school committee is proof of this behavior, as is his working on Sundays in defiance of religious decrees.

He also encourages others to fight for their own personal freedom. This is shown when he encourages Bailey to fight against the injustice of a three-month wait for trial. Another example is the time he urges Ellen to stand up to her father over his narrow-minded views, which he demonstrates by literally "rocking the boat" they are rowing. When Sam Staples tells him that he must arrest him because it is his duty, Henry encourages him to quit his job. None of these characters accepts Henry's advice, at least in part because they simply cannot understand the idea that they can say "NO" to what society expects of them.

All of the other characters in the play end up being contrasted with Henry, and each of them fail to measure up in some way. John shares Henry's views on Transcendentalism, but encourages him to apologize to Ball so that he can keep teaching. He also does not have the courage to keep thinking creatively; when the school fails, John leaves to work at the "pencil factory," which becomes a symbol of conformity. Ellen begins to grasp the basics of Transcendentalism, but she is unwilling or unable to put Henry's philosophy into action and marry either John or Henry against her father's wishes.

Despite his belief in freedom, however, Henry shows himself to be enslaved to Waldo's thoughts and ideas. When we first see Waldo giving a lecture, Henry chants back the words he hears. This demonstrates that even while he is absorbing the concepts Waldo teaches he is also actually doing the rote learning he professes to hate. He also tells John that he wants to be just like Waldo, even as he says that he wants to break free of the chains of intellectualism. This connection with Waldo is important because in the second act Henry will start to become disillusioned with his idol's inaction.

Another important theme that will become even more significant later in the play is Henry's disillusionment with intellectualism. When he returns from Harvard, he notes to John that apart from Waldo's lectures he did not learn anything, and adds that Waldo was "not even a professor." He also says repeatedly during the act that he does not want to think but rather wants to simply experience the world without having being clouded by thoughts. The school that he and John start is perhaps the clearest example of this stand against intellectualism; they challenge their students to experience things for themselves, and to "be" themselves. The fact that this school does not work is not so much a failure as it is a vindication of Henry's ideas: as demonstrated by Edmund, his students became so independent that they challenged their parents too much to be allowed to continue.

The final theme introduced in this act is civil disobedience. Henry chooses to not pay his taxes in protest of the war in Mexico, and in doing so, he is demonstrating how an individual can protest against the system. While the other people in the town ridicule him for his lack of loyalty to the United States, Henry likens his protest to the spirit that prompted the Declaration of Independence. While his solitary protest is proving to be ineffective, he notes that if more men were willing to protest in this fashion, they could wield real power.

This theme of civil disobedience against an unjust war had real social significance at the time the play was first performed, as America was embroiled in a war in Vietnam. The play was seen as a significant political tool, with Henry's commitment to passive resistance as a symbol of the fact that people can protest against their government. The first act also establishes that challenging the accepted is both a right and a privilege; when Waldo asks what Henry is doing in jail, Henry asks him what he is doing out of jail and not actively protesting the war in Mexico.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

The act opens with Henry soliloquizing about freedom. He is speaking to the sleeping Bailey, describing the choice he has made between paying his taxes and asserting his independence. He adds that the government is afraid of the choice he has made, because it may encourage others to do the same.

The scene then shifts to Henry and Lydian. Lydian insists that Henry must learn to conform ("to *get* along, you have to *go* along!"). Henry reacts violently against this idea, chanting her words back to her in protest. Lydian then sends Edward berry picking with Henry, which Henry describes as Huckleberry hunting. Henry describes how he used to gather Huckleberries when he was a child, an activity that he says was better than just eating the pudding his mother made from them.

Henry and Edward gleefully gather and eat Huckleberries for a time. When Edward spills his full basket of berries, Henry comforts him with the knowledge that he has now planted new Huckleberry plants. Edward is so pleased that he says he wishes Henry was his father. The scene then shifts back to the Emerson house, where Lydian is writing a letter. Edward gives his mother the berries and tells her that he wants Henry to be his father. He explains that his father is often away from the house, and suggests that the ever-present Henry would be not only a better father but also a husband for her.

Lydian then suggests Henry should leave while Waldo is away in England. They briefly discuss love and loneliness, with some signs of tension between them. Edward then re-enters, and we learn that Henry has made gloves for the chickens to keep them from scratching up Lydian's roses. Lydian is touched by his gesture, urging him to get married. Henry replies that "nature is his mother-in-law," and that he could not choose any of the young women she suggests. When she asks if he is lonely, he turns the question back on her and there is another moment of sexual tension between the two characters.

The scene shifts back to the jail cell, where Bailey asks Henry to be his lawyer. Henry tells him he thinks lawyers are devils, and this is why the "Devil still gives advice to Presidents." Bailey is clearly panicked, asking Henry for advice. Henry glibly suggests he is born in a more liberal age, or that he try prayer. Bailey asks for help praying, and Henry makes up a poem / prayer for him that has more to do with his own beliefs than with Bailey's legal troubles:

"Blessed Are the Young

For they do not read the President's speeches

Blessed Are They who never read a newspaper,

For they shall see Nature and, through her, God

And Blessed is Bailey, for he's a good fellow

and deserves better treatment than you've been

giving him – even though he *is* a man of letters."

Henry then tells Bailey he prays with a flute, and the scene shifts to Henry's small plot of land at Walden Pond. Henry is playing the flute when Williams, an escaped slave, appears. He attacks Henry, but Henry calms him down and learns that Williams is headed for Canada. Henry gives him some bread, and is pleased when Williams tells him of his desire to escape slavery. Williams is worried Henry will turn him in, but Henry assures him he is free. Williams then asks why Henry lives in slave-like poverty, and Henry tells him he has chosen to live outside of society and has married his bean patch.

When Williams says he wants to call himself Mr. Henry's Williams, Henry objects violently and tells him to never describe himself as a possession. Williams decides to adopt the name Henry Williams. Henry then tells Williams that the workday that has become the norm in the North is a kind of slavery, since men are slaves to money. Williams is pleased with his advice and wants to stay in Walden. Henry tells him that he has to find a place where the color of his skin will not get him into trouble and urges him to go to Canada.

The scene then shifts to another part of the stage, where Henry and Waldo are arguing. Waldo is asserting that the "majority rules" form of government ensures that change happens peacefully and at the right pace. Henry says that Waldo should use his fame and "influence" to effect change, and that change happening at the right pace does not help today's slaves. We learn that Williams has been shot at the border, and that the two are discussing the release of slaves.

Waldo expresses sympathy about Williams' death, but Henry accuses him of treating Williams as an idea rather than as a person. Henry urges Emerson to speak out, and expresses his disappointment that his idol has not taken a stand in the battle against slavery. He begins to discuss Waldo's virtues with what the stage directions call a "mixture of admiration and contempt." Waldo marvels at Henry, and expresses his own admiration for Henry's beliefs. He refers to Henry as a "walking ethic," living proof of Transcendentalism.

Henry tells Waldo that he has to do more than just cast a vote in an election. He notes that Waldo has to go out of his comfort zone to speak out against injustice. Then Henry accuses Waldo of being "spineless" in his beliefs, which Waldo denies. Waldo asks whether he should start a violent rebellion, and Henry insists that he should stop violence. He argues that Williams' shooting has brought violence to Concord.

Waldo then accuses Henry of resigning from the human race, and asks what would happen if everyone did so. He tells Henry that they are in a war, and Henry notes that the war in Mexico is motivated by a desire for more land for Southern slave owners.

Waldo tells him they need to work within the laws to fight the war. Henry is disgusted and goes to leave. Waldo asks him what he thinks he should do, and Henry tells him to speak out against the war. Henry leaves to gather an audience.

Henry rings the town bell, and tells everyone that Waldo will be giving a speech. A crowd gathers and waits impatiently, but Waldo does not appear. Instead, Lydian comes to tell them that Waldo "wants more time to meditate on these matters." Henry objects and Lydian is described as being torn between sharing Henry's opinions and loyalty to Waldo.

The crowd disperses and Henry and Lydian are left to talk. Lydian notes that Waldo loves Henry, and asks why Henry hurts him. Henry notes than Waldo hurts him, and in a heated exchange, he adds that Waldo's intellectualism makes him inaccessible. Henry then recognizes that his devotion to Waldo has stripped away some of his self. Lydian accuses him of trying to make Waldo something he is not, and urges Henry to let Waldo be himself. Lydian leaves and Henry tries to get the town's attention once more. He shouts with no response and tries to ring the bell, but no sound emerges. Henry is discouraged, and the lights fade on him, as he is feeling powerless.

The scene shifts back to the jail cell, where Henry is having a fitful sleep. The lighting in this scene makes it clear that this is a dream, with frightening blasts of red and other psychedelic colors. His nightmare of the war is enacted upon the stage, with characters from the play assuming roles. Edward is a young drummer boy, Sam Staples is a Sergeant, and Bailey and a Farmer become soldiers. Ball becomes a general, and urges them all to learn how to kill. Bailey refuses to fight, and is shouted down.

Sergeant Sam wakes the sleeping Henry and gives him a rifle. Henry objects, but is forced to participate. Ball tells them they will assault the enemy. Henry refuses, and is praised by his Mother. Waldo appears as the President, and General Ball asks him whether he will "go along" with their plan to destroy the enemy. Henry tries to object but no sound comes from his mouth, and Waldo ignores him. Waldo says that he wants more time to think, and lets Ball do whatever he wants.

Williams appears dressed as a Mexican soldier. Henry urges him to run away, and the soldiers all shoot at him. As Williams darts offstage, he is followed by racist epithets. Edward falls wounded, and Henry goes to care for him. Waldo says he will write an essay, and Henry is desperate for someone to do something about the war.

All action on stage stops as an unseen voice addressing Congress and urging the President to stop the war. Although the war scene restarts in slow motion, Henry praises the speaker, whom he calls Congressman Lincoln from Illinois. The war resumes in full speed, with violent bursts of light and noise. Sergeant Sam urges the troops to form a line and start firing. Henry sees his brother John amongst the troops and rushes to him. John is shot, and Henry wails in grief.

The war scene fades, and we see Sam back in his regular clothes waking up Henry, who is still deep in his dream. Sam brings him breakfast, and tells him that the telegraph

line to Texas has been finished. He also tells Henry that someone has paid his taxes and he can leave. Henry presses Sam to find out who paid, and Henry is disgusted to find that his Aunt Louisa paid the bill. Henry refuses to leave, and Sam tells him that he must.

Henry then changes his tactics, insisting on staying until Bailey goes to trial or until he is released. Sam says he cannot make that happen, and Henry lies on his cot to wait. He tells Sam to tell the Judge and Selectmen to get Bailey's trial happening. Sam leaves, and Bailey thanks Henry for his efforts. He tells Henry that he will come to visit him at Walden, and the audience hears the flute playing once again.

Henry tells Bailey that he will have to leave Walden, because it is too much like Heaven. He likens his self-imposed isolation to staying in a ship's cabin during a sea voyage, and says that he himself must step out of his comfort zone to make a difference. The flute melody stops, and Henry says that he can no longer try to escape the world.

Henry is at first saddened by what he is giving up, but then decides, "It's not necessary to be there in order to *be* there." This realization inspires him, and he bids goodbye to Bailey. He hears the beat of an "eccentric, non-military drummer." The play closes with Henry experiencing new strength and striding confidently off stage

Act 2 Analysis

The major themes developed in Act 1 are continued and strengthened in Act 2. Henry opens the act by talking about freedom, and expresses the thought that his choice to go to jail was a free choice. He also discusses the idea that society is frightened by people who choose freedom over conformity. His ideas are highlighted when Lydian tells him he should conform and he objects to her "go along to get along" attitude.

The exchange between Henry and Lydian early in the chapter shows that in his efforts to be like Waldo, Henry has started to assume some of the threads of Waldo's life. This includes taking a parental role to Edward and the suggestion of romance between himself and Waldo's wife. Lydian seems to be the only one who can see how strange Henry's craving to be like Waldo is, and she urges him to discover other facets of his life, such as marriage.

Henry's exchange with Bailey about lawyers shows Henry that while his humor and witticisms may be biting social commentary, in the end, they are ineffective. When he offers Bailey glib suggestions, Bailey becomes increasingly desperate. This teaches Henry that his humorous jabs cannot free Bailey, and that more action is required.

The introduction of the escaped slave Williams also prompts Henry to reconsider his theory that one man can make a difference. He urges Williams to adopt personal freedoms, but shows realistic expectations by telling Williams he cannot stay in Concord. Williams' death, however, shows Henry that change cannot be effected from within the system, which intellectuals like Waldo believe is the best course.

However, the themes of intellectualism and freedom are brought together when Waldo and Henry finally clash. While Henry lashes out at his hero for preferring the comfortable life of an academic to the more difficult struggle of a social crusader, Waldo points out that Henry's quest for freedom has actually separated him from society, which makes him equally ineffective. Henry persists, though sure that the voice of one person can help stop the war.

When Waldo fails to show up for his speech, Henry is forced to face the fact that the man he claims to love and respect cannot live up to his expectations. The idea that Henry is trying to "make" Waldo into an activist is demonstrated when Lydian tells him that he must give Waldo the same freedom to choose his course that he wants for himself. Henry's nightmare is in some sense less about the war in Mexico than it is about his disillusionment with his hero, who does not (and maybe could never) live up to Henry's high expectations.

Activism is another theme explored in Act 2. Henry sees himself as an activist, and believes that by going to jail he may garner some attention from other people. Through the flashback scenes, we learn that this opinion has evolved, and that he originally believed that you needed fame and reputation to be able to speak out against injustice. However, the realization that an obscure Congressman from Illinois (who would later go on to be one of America's most renowned Presidents) could be heard in the halls of power seems to inspire him to begin to believe in himself.

Lee and Lawrence also further develop the idea of what war Henry is fighting against by introducing the fight against slavery into the play. As Henry notes, the war in Mexico is at least in part prompted by the desires of slave owners. He also notes that slavery is not confined to the south, since Williams was shot just nearby by a person from Massachusetts. The war against slavery, then, is likened to Henry's fight against the war in Mexico. One interesting parallel to this is the reality that the war in Vietnam was fought in large part by young black men who were unable to buy their way out of or otherwise evade the draft. These black soldiers were, in essence, enslaved by the army to fight, and while many white draftees were able to escape from military service.

Finally, the idea of isolation is absolutely, essential in this act. As the play begins, we see Henry fighting against the injustices he experiences by withdrawing from the world at Walden Pond. When he realizes there are greater injustices, however, he finds that his withdrawal from society has left him without a voice. This powerlessness is what prompts him to try to get Waldo to speak, but Waldo does not share the depth of his convictions. In the end, he decides he must leave Walden and its isolation from the world to be able to create a voice for his self, making a difference in the fight against injustice.

Characters

Bailey

Bailey is Henry's vagrant cellmate, who has landed in prison after he fell asleep in somebody's barn and burned it down by accident. Henry tries many times to talk to Bailey about his crusade against conformity, but Bailey is an uneducated man, who says he cannot even write his own name, much less understand Henry's preaching. Henry shows Bailey how to write his name, but then encourages him to unlearn it, since writing will only get him in trouble. Bailey is excited to hear about Henry's place in Walden Woods, and says that he [Henry] had a place to call home. Bailey gets panicked about the idea of a trial, and asks Henry to be his lawyer, since he is an educated man. Henry refuses, and Bailey frantically asks him what he can do. Although he does not believe in it, Henry suggests prayer, and Bailey asks Henry to help him pray. Henry is outraged when he finds out that Bailey has been waiting three months for a trial, and at the end of the play, threatens to sit in the jail cell until Sam Staples intervenes on the behalf of Bailey. Bailey is touched, since nobody has ever stuck up for him before, and says that when he gets out of jail, he may come visit Henry at Walden Woods. However, Henry says that the Walden stage of his life is over, and he needs to rejoin civilization and take a stand. In Henry's nightmare, Bailey is a civilian soldier who refuses to fight.

Deacon Nehemiah Ball

Deacon Nehemiah Ball, a religious leader who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry. When Ball visits Henry's class, he is shocked that Henry is deviating from the authorized textbooks and considers Henry's transcendental view of God to be blasphemous. Ball is also outraged when he finds Henry working on Sunday. When Henry refuses to pay his taxes, Ball is the first to suggest throwing him in jail. In Henry's nightmare, Ball is the General, who advocates destroying the enemy and who incites the Federal forces to kill.

Edward Emerson

Edward Emerson is the son of Waldo and Lydian, and he wishes Henry was his father instead of the often absent Waldo. Edward's parents hire Henry to work as a handyman and serve as a companion and tutor to Edward. Henry takes Edward hunting for huckleberries, and Edward gets excited and drops his basket of berries. Although he is upset, Henry consoles him, saying that he is helping to fertilize the earth to make more huckleberries. Edward is delighted when Henry puts gloves on the claws of Lydian's chickens—so that they cannot trample Lydian's flowers anymore. In Henry's nightmare, Edward plays a drummer boy who is wounded in the fight. When Henry carries the wounded boy to Waldo, the president in the dream, the dream Waldo echoes his

noncommittal statement from before, saying that he needs to write a carefully worded essay about the situation.

Lydian Emerson

Lydian is the wife and supporter of Waldo, and encourages Henry to settle down, get married, and conform. Although Lydian appears to agree with many of Henry's ideas, she refuses to go against her husband by supporting Henry. Lydian is a lonely wife, since Waldo is often away giving lectures. She tells Henry that Waldo cannot possibly live up to the ideal image that Henry has painted of her husband. It is Lydian who comes in place of Waldo, to tell Henry and the assembled crowd that her husband is not ready to speak yet. In Waldo's old age, Lydian helps her befuddled husband remember Henry's name, the event that starts the play.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of America's greatest writers, is in this play shown to be an ineffective preacher when compared with Henry's activism. Waldo gives many lectures at Harvard outlining the beliefs of Transcendentalism, and he finds a willing acolyte in one of his audience members, Henry David Thoreau. Waldo hires Henry as a handyman and tutor for his son, Edward, in exchange for the use of a piece of Waldo's wooded estate. This arrangement later provides the location for Henry's Walden Woods project. Waldo spends much of his time writing or delivering lectures, much to the chagrin of his lonely wife, Lydian, who nevertheless supports Waldo completely. Waldo and Henry become great friends, but the friendship sours when Henry gets fed up with Waldo's lack of public protest.

Henry accuses Waldo of failing to use the whole of his massive influence to speak out against such injustices as slavery and the war in Mexico. Waldo marvels at the fact that Henry is a living, breathing example of the principles that he lectures on, but is unable to adopt an activist lifestyle of protest himself. Instead, he prefers to work within the laws, and write his lectures and essays. When Henry challenges Waldo to become a greater activist by speaking to the town, Waldo tentatively agrees, but backs out after Henry has already gathered a crowd. Waldo sends Lydian to let Henry know that Waldo will not be giving the speech. At the end of the first act, Waldo asks Henry what he is doing in jail, while Henry counters, asking Waldo why he is out of jail. In other words, if Waldo really practiced what he preached, he would refuse to pay his taxes and protest in jail as Henry is. In Henry's nightmare, Waldo is the president, who refuses to acknowledge the war tragedies that are happening around him or make any decisions; instead, he says he needs to write careful essays about them, echoing his earlier message about why he cannot speak out like Henry.

Farmer

The Farmer appears twice when Henry's actions draw a crowd, and he claims that Henry is always starting false fires, as when he says Waldo is going to give a speech and Waldo does not. In Henry's nightmare, the farmer serves as a soldier.

Henry

*See*Henry David Thoreau

Henry's Mother

Henry's mother does not understand why Henry always acts so strange, and wishes he would just conform like everybody else. Henry's mother calls Henry by his official name, "David Henry," even though Henry prefers to go by his middle name. She disdains Henry's working on Sunday, and prays that Ellen Sewell will accept John's marriage proposal. At John's funeral, she tries to get Henry to pray, but Henry is unable to pray to a God that felt it necessary to take John.

Ellen Sewell

Ellen Sewell is a young woman who attracts both Henry and John, and who declines John's marriage proposal. Ellen is much older than the other students in Henry's and John's school, although she asks to be able to study with them. She is intrigued, then turned off, by Henry's transcendental beliefs, and Henry suggests that she go to church with John. Although she does accompany John to church, she claims that her father is forbidding her from marrying either Henry or John. However, Henry and John both believe that she wants to have both brothers. When John dies, Ellen is out of town, so she asks Henry what has happened. Henry is very rude to her, describing John's death in very graphic terms, which shocks her at first. In the end, however, she suggests that maybe they are meant to transcend John's death, an admission that makes Henry believe Ellen is starting to understand his beliefs.

Constable Sam Staples

Sam Staples is the law enforcement officer in Concord, who reluctantly throws Henry in jail. Sam is a good-natured man, who first of all serves Henry with his bill for unpaid taxes, then offers to loan Henry the money to pay for them. Henry is outraged at this suggestion, and forces Sam to take him to jail. Sam does not understand why Henry will not just pay his taxes. At the end of the first act, Henry explains that he does not want his tax money to support the Mexican-American war. This is the first time that Henry has stated outright why he is in jail, a question that it posed at the beginning of the first act

but not answered until this point. In Henry's nightmare, Sam is a Sergeant, who inspires his troops to hate, and who forces Henry and Bailey to take guns they do not want.

Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau, considered one of America's greatest writers, is the fiery protagonist who goes to jail. In the beginning of the play, Henry is in jail, but the audience does not find out until the end of the first act that it is because he does not want to pay the taxes that will support the Mexican-American war. Henry is an uncompromising believer in casting off the chains of conformity and deliberately suggests that society should do things differently, such as starting the alphabet with a different letter. Because of these ideas, his mother, and indeed many of the townspeople, find Henry strange. Henry is a Harvard-educated man, but does not believe in conventional education. He tries teaching his open-minded beliefs in the strictly ensored school, and when that fails, he opens his own ill-fated school with his brother, John. He is initially attracted to Ellen Sewell, but realizes that his brother, John, would make a better match, although Ellen turns John down. After John's death, Henry's views on organized religion and his belief in a caring God deteriorate even more.

A devoted disciple and friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry spends all of his energies trying to adhere to the ideals that Waldo lectures about. At one point, Henry hires on as Waldo's handyman and the tutor of Waldo's son, Edward, in exchange for the use of part of Waldo's wooded estate, which later becomes Thoreau's Walden. Henry encounters an escaped slave, Williams, at Walden, and treats him as a free man. Henry is distraught when he hears that Williams was shot as he was trying to make his way to Canada, and uses the incident to launch an argument about Waldo's lack of activism. Henry accuses Waldo of not practicing what he preaches, even though Waldo has much more influence than Henry and could do more good. Waldo tentatively agrees to give an impromptu speech against slavery and the war in Mexico, but backs out, leaving Henry to try, unsuccessfully, to get the attention of the frustrated townspeople. In Henry's nightmare, he is initially sleeping, as the war rages around him. Sam Staples wakes Henry up within his dream, forces a gun in his hand, and forces him to join the nightmarish war. When Waldo appears as the president, Henry tries to talk to him, but Waldo cannot hear anything that he is saying, and refuses to comment on the war or make any decisions. At the end of the play, Henry wakes up to find that his tax has been paid by his Aunt Louisa, a fact that angers him. When Henry leaves the jail, he vows to leave Walden and take his activism to the next level.

John Thoreau

John Thoreau is Henry's much-loved brother, who shares many of Henry's beliefs, but does not have the same conviction as Henry. John welcomes Henry home from Harvard, and the two brothers discuss their lack of faith in conventional education. However, John convinces Henry to apologize to Deacon Ball, so that Henry can save his job. After the school founded by Henry and John fails, John goes back to his job at

the pencil factory. Both John and Henry are attracted to Ellen Sewell, a young woman who asks to join their school. When Henry's attempt to win her love fails, he encourages her to see John. However, although she accompanies John to church, Ellen does not accept his marriage proposal, because her father does not like the Thoreau brothers. Also, as John and Henry discuss, it appears that she wants both brothers, not just one or the other. John dies from blood poisoning, after he cuts himself shaving with an old razor. In Henry's nightmare, John is a Federal soldier, who dies at the end of the dream.

Waldo

*See*Ralph Waldo Emerson

Henry Williams

Henry Williams, an escaped slave who derives his first name from Thoreau and his last name from his former owner, encounters Henry in Walden Woods. Although Williams is suspicious of Henry at first, he is soon amazed that Henry treats him as an equal. Henry gives Williams food, and is distraught when he hears that Williams has been shot while trying to escape to Canada.

Themes

Freedom

The overriding message in the play is the struggle for freedom, which manifests itself in several ways. The idea of racial freedom is addressed through the many references to slavery. During the play, Henry meets a slave, Williams, who plans to go "North as I kin git! They say the Norther ya git, the *free-er* ya git!" However, although Henry supports Williams's escape to Canada, he warns him that men in the north are not free, either: "Every man shackled to a ten-hour-a-day is a *work*-slave. Every man who has to worry about next month's rent is a *money*-slave."

This idea of being chained to institutions, even within a free society, is expressed further through Henry's individual struggle. When he is confronted by Sam Staples, the friendly constable tells Henry he has to pay his taxes, to help support the war. Henry, however, refuses to pay, on the grounds that he does not support the war and says that he does not want to be part of a society that does:

If *one* honest man in this state of Massachusetts had the conviction and the courage to withdraw from this unholy partnership and let himself be locked up in the County Jail, it'd be the start of more true freedom than we've seen since a few farmers had the guts to block the British by the bridge up the road.

With statements like this about various social institutions, and with his resulting actions —Henry *does* have the courage to be locked up—Henry proves that he is willing to stand up against conformity, a phrase commonly referred to as "rocking the boat." This phrase is given a very literal translation in the play when Henry is in a boat with Ellen Sewell, whose father has forbidden her or her brother, Edmund, to attend Henry's school. Says Henry: "Stand up to your father! (*He stands. The boat rocks.*)" This action terrifies Ellen, as it does society.

Finally, the lack of freedom is expressed through dialogue, specifically the words "get along" and "go along," which are used by various characters to imply that one should just "go along" with whatever society dictates. When Henry wants to complain about the fact that his cellmate, Bailey, has been waiting three months for trial, Bailey stops him, saying he does not want to "make a ruckus. I'm not a troublemaker. I just want to earn my keep, make a little tobakky money, and get along." As Henry says to Bailey, "'Get along'!" Those words turn my stomach." At the beginning of the second act, Lydian tells Henry that "in order to *get* along, you have to *go* along," a statement that enrages Henry, who responds by shouting "GO ALONG! GO ALONG! GO ALONG!" Shortly after that, Waldo tells Henry that "We have to go along with the majority!" a statement that again frustrates Henry. Finally, in Henry's nightmare, General Ball asks President Waldo if he is prepared to "go along" with the military's plan to "conquer the entire territory." In response to this, all of the characters chant "Go along!" several times, emphasizing that most, in the end, will conform.

Activism

Because of his objections to various social ills like slavery and the war against Mexico, Henry becomes an activist, although in the beginning, his form of activism is very passive, rebelling against society by retreating from it and living at Walden. Waldo calls Henry on this fact during their argument about activism. Says Waldo, "And what are you doing about it, young man? You pull the woods up over your head. You resign from the human race." Henry is not deterred, however, and challenges Waldo, asking him if he is really aware of what is going on in the war. Here, Henry merges his distaste for slavery and the war against Mexico into one comment. Says Henry, when describing the reasons for the war, it is "slave-holders grasping for more slave territory? *More* slavery and less freedom, is that what you want?"

As the play progresses chronologically, Henry's activism becomes more pronounced than just retreating from society. After his heated conversation with Waldo, Henry convinces his mentor to address the issues of slavery and war in a public statement and goes to drum up a crowd for the speech. He rings Concord's town bell, and people come running. He preps the crowd, getting them excited by saying that "Emerson is going to rile up the whole country. And you're going to hear it *first*!" However, Waldo backs out of the speech, and when the townspeople realize it was a false alarm, they start to leave. Henry tries to get them to come back, by ringing the bell again, but this time, as the stage directions indicate, "*THE BELL DOES NOT RING*!" Henry wonders aloud: "How do we make a sound? How do we break the silence?" He is an activist who has tried to use others, like Waldo, to spread the message, but has been unsuccessful. In the end, after Henry wakes from his nightmare, he realizes that he needs to be more personally active, and tells Bailey that if he comes to find Henry at Walden, "I may not be there." As the final stage directions indicate, Henry is moving to the next step in his activism: "*He seems to grow in stature, lifted and strengthened by a greater challenge.*" Henry realizes that he cannot count on other people like Waldo to change society, that he must leave Walden and try to change society himself.

Intellectualism

In contrast to Henry's activism, Waldo's intellectualism—thinking thoroughly about the situation but rarely acting—is shown to be ineffective. Through his lectures and writings at Harvard and elsewhere, Waldo has inspired people like Henry to "'Cast Conformity behind you.'" As a result, Waldo has become a very popular and influential public figure. Because Waldo never rocks the boat by actually achieving the ideal that he sets forth in his lectures, this is a very safe popularity. Henry, however, does attempt to follow the style of independent, transcendental life outlined in Waldo's writings. In fact, Waldo calls Henry, "my walking ethic!" Waldo is the type of person who cannot live up to his ideals if they compromise his personal security.

Waldo's ineffectiveness is demonstrated when he refuses to show up for the public appearance that Henry sets up. Waldo's wife, Lydian, is the one who delivers Waldo's

message, saying that her husband, "wants more time to meditate on these matters. . . . So that he can write a careful essay setting forth his position." This highly intellectual approach angers Henry, who wants Waldo to take action. In addition, Lydian's words haunt Henry, literally, when President Waldo speaks them in Henry's nightmare, saying variations of Lydian's quote in response to the questions of whether or not he supports total destruction of the enemy and in what he thinks about the fact that his son has been shot.

Style

Expressionism

Expressionism was a movement that was popular in drama and other, mainly visual, arts, beginning in Germany in the 1910s. Expressionism has never been completely defined in concrete terms, which is oddly fitting, since the main characteristic of expressionistic works is their tendency to bend concrete reality—to express emotions and ideas. In the case of *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, Lawrence and Lee bend reality by staging their drama in a shifting landscape, where the main characters, especially Henry, move instantly and dream-like through time and space. The resulting dream-like episodes cause the audience to become somewhat disoriented. Ultimately, these feelings express the playwrights' message—activism is not always easy, and can in fact be uncomfortable and unpredictable, just like the respective wars that were going on in Thoreau's time (the Mexican War) and in the 1970s (the Vietnam War).

Time and Space

As noted above, the characters in the play move through time frequently. These time and space jumps all take place either in or around Henry's jail cell. Although Henry's jail cell is constantly present on stage, he leaves it often—sometimes physically, sometimes not—to travel to other times and places. An example of Henry jumping through time and space without leaving his cell occurs when John visits Henry in his jail cell, Henry is in a trance, remembering a speech that he has heard Waldo say at Harvard. John looks at Henry, who is still stuck in his memory of Harvard, and says: "Now here's a rare specimen—."

At the end of this statement, Waldo makes a remark from another part of the stage, and then, as the stage directions indicate, "*The light intensifies on Henry and John—the amber of sunny fields.*" At this point, John picks up his specimen conversation from the jail cell and continues talking until Henry notices him and comes out of his trance. With the lighting change, the time and place have shifted from the jail cell to a meadow, just after Henry has returned from Harvard. In addition to the lighting, this fact is revealed to the audience when John says, "Welcome home. How's your overstuffed brain?" Although Henry is still technically in the jail cell as far as the stage dynamics are concerned, the playwrights convey to the audience the time and place of the new location through lighting and dialogue. In some cases, Lawrence and Lee indicate the time and space change by having Henry or another character move to a different part of the stage, or by having Henry use a stage prop such as a chair or storage locker.

However, depending upon how subtle these clues are, the audience is sometimes called upon to work harder to recognize these setting shifts. For example, at the beginning of the second act, after Henry erupts at Lydian for telling him that he has to "*go* along," the stage directions indicate that "*Lydian has reached for a little straw berry-*

basket." With this small act, the setting shifts smoothly to an earlier time, using Lydian's words of "go along" as a transition from the argument to a time right before Henry takes Edward huckleberry hunting. Says Lydian in the next line, "Edward? (*The little boy comes running to her.*) Go along with Mr. Thoreau." This more subtle technique makes it harder for the audience to follow, but, once again, underscores the expressionistic and uncomfortable quality of the play. Although the entire play is dreamlike, the play achieves its ultimate expression in the actual dream at the end of the play, Henry's nightmare, which convinces Henry to take action.

Foil

In the play, the characters are all juxtaposed with Henry, and in the process become foils for him. A foil is a character who, when placed next to another character, makes the other character seem better in some way. In this case, Henry is the obvious activist, and his status as an activist is raised when Henry is compared to the other characters, who all experience a relative lack of activism. As described above, the most overt foil is Waldo, whose intellectualism prevents him from acting. However, other characters in the story also exhibit various degrees of activism, such as Henry's brother John, who agrees with Henry's ideas of unconventional schooling, saying that: "All a school needs is a mind that sends, and minds that receive." John even partners with Henry to start their own school. However, after they lose most of their students, John loses heart and leaves to go "back to the pencil factory," a conforming job that compromises the ideals that he and Henry share. Henry, on the other hand, decides to trade his intellectual pursuits for natural pursuits, eventually hiring on as Waldo's handyman, although, even then, he refuses to be paid in money, instead preferring a gift of nature: "Perhaps, some day, if my work has been useful to you, and if we remain friends, I may ask you for a bit of your woods."

Ellen Sewell is also a foil for Henry. When Ellen first comes to sit in on classes at Henry's and John's school, she is intrigued by everything Henry is saying, and takes down notes. Henry tells her: "Don't just remember what I said. Remember what I'm talking about." Although Ellen eventually stops taking notes, showing that she can follow this concept of nonconformity, she nevertheless does not fully adopt the transcendentalist ideas that Henry tries to explain to her. Says Henry: "When you transcend the limits of yourself, you can cease merely living—and begin to BE!" However, Ellen is "a little bit afraid—just—to 'be!'" and as a result soon goes back to her normal life of conformity, as most of the characters do. Because of this contrast between the other characters and Henry, the only one who persists in trying to achieve the ideal that Waldo has set forth, Henry appears as the ultimate activist.

Historical Context

The American Renaissance

During the time the play takes place, America was experiencing a renaissance, or rebirth, in the arts, particularly literature. This renaissance was sparked mainly by Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose famous Harvard addresses in the 1830s inspired other contemporary New England writers, like Thoreau, to produce many great literary works. At the center of Emerson's teachings and the American Renaissance was the idea of Transcendentalism, a literary and philosophical movement that idealized self-sufficiency and freedom of individual thought and opposition to conformity, even to the point of neglecting to form a concrete definition of Transcendentalism itself. Transcendentalists were opposed to rationalism and, ultimately, believed in the potential of the human mind to transcend the physical reality and thus find the meaning in life. Along with Emerson and Thoreau, other writers of the American Renaissance formed a group that was eventually called the Transcendental Club. Members included Nathaniel Hawthorne and Bronson Alcott, both residents of Concord. Bronson was the father of Louisa May Alcott, another writer who would later incorporate the Transcendentalist beliefs she learned as a child into her own writings later in the century.

Mexican War

As Henry notes in the play, he refuses to pay taxes that will go to support the Mexican War, which was taking place at the time Thoreau was arrested. The Mexican War, also known as the Mexican-American War, took place between the United States and Mexico from April 1846 to February 1848. The war began over a dispute between the two countries about where the dividing line was between Texas—which the United States had annexed in 1845—and Mexico. In 1845, directly following this annexation, President James Polk sent an emissary to negotiate both the border dispute and to try to buy additional lands—modern-day New Mexico and California. Mexico refused to negotiate, and Polk sent General Zachary Taylor and his troops into the disputed border area, which technically belonged to Mexico. This move, in turn, instigated an attack by Mexican forces. Polk cited this attack as taking place on American territory—even though the dispute over the Mexico border territory had not been settled—and Congress authorized a war. Support for the war was largely divided. Although Polk and many southerners were ecstatic, many in the northern states viewed the war as an attempt to acquire more lands, which some believed were only for the purpose of creating more slave-holding southern states.

The war was one-sided, as United States's technologically advanced forces won consecutive battles on two fronts. Under Colonel Stephen Kearny, New Mexico and California were easily occupied, with the native populations putting up little fight. Meanwhile, in Mexico, General Taylor's forces conquered the Mexican forces in a couple of key battles, but neglected to follow the defeated forces farther into Mexico.

When President Polk learned of this, he deployed a different force, under the direction of General Winfield Scott, to land at Veracruz and march inland to overtake Mexico's capital, Mexico City. On September 14, 1847, after a series of victories, Scott's forces conquered the capital. As a result of the treaty between the two nations, Mexico sold the United States much of the land in current Southwestern states such as New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, Texas, and western Colorado, for $15 million.

Vietnam Antiwar Protests

When Lawrence and Lee wrote *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, they used Thoreau's historical protest against the Mexican War as a form of current protest against the Vietnam War. This method of protest was more subtle than many other antiwar protests used during Vietnam. Common methods of protest during Vietnam included men burning their draft cards, which legally obligated them to report for duty in the military. Because skipping this duty was a punishable offense, some were not content with destroying their cards, and fled the country—in many cases to Canada—to avoid military service or prosecution. Some chose to ignore their draft notices and stay inside the country, actively voicing their protest. Among the more famous protesters was world-champion heavyweight boxer, Mohammed Ali, who in 1967 refused to be drafted as a result of his religious beliefs. Ali's case went to court later that year, and he was sentenced to five years prison and a $10,000 fine, although he eventually appealed the case all the way to the Supreme Court, which decided three years later to reverse the decision and let Ali go free. However, Ali was not so lucky in his boxing career. When he refused to be drafted, the World Boxing Association and the New York State Athletic Commission stripped Ali of his championship boxing title and revoked his boxing license, a decision that remained in effect until the Supreme Court's decision, at which point Ali was able to box again.

Besides protesting the draft, others protested the war itself in demonstrations, many of which were meant to be nonviolent. One of the most famous, and tragic, of these protests took place on Kent State University's campus in May 1970. Following the April 30 announcement by President Richard Nixon that the United States' military forces were invading Cambodia, students at Kent State staged the first of many demonstrations that week. As the demonstrations spawned rioting and arson, Ohio's governor called in the state's National Guard to try to maintain order. During the demonstrations on May 4, the National Guardsmen fired a number of bullets into the crowd, killing four students and injuring many others. Although many of the students on campus were protesting the war, some were merely gathering in the protest area to eat their lunch or watch what was going on. In the end, the four students that were killed were never confirmed as protesters. This tragic event ignited college campuses around the country in protest, and many campuses were temporarily closed as a result.

Critical Overview

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail is one of Lawrence and Lee's most famous plays, although it has received very little critical attention. As Alan Woods wrote in his introduction to the play in *The Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee*, the play was "widely produced across North America," but "was deliberately never performed either on or off Broadway." As Woods noted, Lawrence and Lee did this to demonstrate "that the theatre could be born and continue to live elsewhere than on a few blocks of Manhattan real estate." As a result, the New York dramatic critics did not review the play. However, as Woods wrote in his general introduction to *The Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee*, the play "was a landmark success in the regional theatre movement."

This pattern of having many successful productions with little critical commentary has been repeated since the play's first productions in 1970. In fact, with rare exception, the only criticism has come from regional newspapers that reviewed local performances, such as Christopher Rowan's 1998 review in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.* Rowan called the play "charmingly artless but also clunky," saying that the play mixes "family comedy" with "homespun philosophy and high-minded debate." In addition, the only major academic commentary has been from Woods, who directs the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute at The Ohio State University—Lawrence's alma mater.

In addition to editing *The Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee*, Woods also wrote the entries for Lawrence and Lee for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography.* As he noted in his Lawrence entry, the play "signaled new modes of production in the American commercial theater," such as having "the stage light grows brighter rather than dimmer" at the end of the play, while "Thoreau strides through the audience to confront the future."

These new modes were used specifically to highlight the playwrights' anti-war message, which resonated with the Vietnamera audiences. As Woods noted in his introduction to *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* in *The Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee*, the play "comments on contemporaneous events, as do most of Lawrence and Lee's plays." Although it has still never been produced in New York, the play has achieved international fame. As Woods notes in his Lawrence entry, in 1989, the play was performed in Hong Kong as a memorial to the students killed during the anti-Communism protest in Tiananmen Square. The play is also frequently used in high school and college courses, and in one notable case, a law school course. In his 1997 article, "Fiction Draws Students Into the Culture of Law," Ronald W. Eades noted how he has used the play as one of the texts in his American Legal History course, since the play provides "a fictional account of issues that are raised in the course."

Today, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* is considered, along with *Inherit the Wind*—another play based on a historical event—to be one of the playwrights' greatest works.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses how Lawrence and Lee use changes in dialogue and plot to slowly darken the tone of their play.

When *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* begins, the play is very lighthearted, and many of Henry's lines are designed to elicit laughs in other characters or the audience. By the end of the play, however, when Henry has his gritty nightmare, humor is replaced by a grim sense of purpose. This change is not abrupt. Rather, over the course of the story, Lawrence and Lee use shifts in Henry's dialogue and the events in his life to induce a gradually darker tone into the play.

In the beginning of the play, Henry is very sarcastic, expressing all sorts of witticisms on various topics. When his mother tells Henry he is "getting everything backward," and wonders how he learned his alphabet, Henry uses this discussion as a transition to give his ideas about the way systems like the alphabet conform to a set pattern, and to suggest alternatives. Says Henry, "*Must* the alphabet begin with A? . . . Why not with Z? Z is a very sociable letter." Henry is equally flippant about the idea of traditional education, and when his brother asks about his Harvard diploma, he says that "They charge you a dollar. And I wouldn't pay it." John says that their mother would have liked to have the diploma to hang up, and Henry gives another witty response: "Let every sheep keep his own skin." Likewise, when Henry is in jail with Bailey in the beginning, and Bailey starts to snore—while Henry is straining to hear something outside—Henry does not just ask his cellmate to stop snoring. Instead, he uses his wit again, to say a line that is meant to make the audience laugh: "Every human being has an inalienable right to snore. *Provided* it does not interfere with the inalienable right of *other* men to snore."

In the first act of the play, Henry also uses witty and playful language to others in the community besides his family and his cellmate. He makes witty comments to his supervisor, Deacon Ball, who calls Henry an atheist. Says Henry, "I've often wondered, Deacon Ball, if atheism might even be popular with God himself." This witty retort causes the audience to think, and once again is intended to elicit a laugh, as is Henry's report to his class that, due to Ball's strict requirements, "You must not listen to a cricket or smell a flower that has not been approved by the School Committee." Henry expands on this joke, by illustrating the logistical improbabilities of doing this with only two hands: "You'd better close both ears and hold your nose—though you may have to grow an extra hand to do it." When Henry opens his own school with his brother, John, he also offers witty comments to his students, such as Ellen Sewell, who he catches taking notes. "*You* keep a notebook," she tells him. Henry's reply is quirky and witty: "I also wear a ridiculous straw hat. That doesn't mean that *you* should wear a ridiculous hat. You'd look ridiculous in it."

Although the play starts out with a lot of witty, playful comments from Henry, it starts to get more serious at this point. Henry is so committed to the idea of not conforming that

he yells at Ellen: "Follow-the-leader is not the game we're playing here! Young lady, BE YOUR OWN MAN!" From this point on, Henry still makes witty comments, such as his witty banter when he is applying for a job with Waldo, and says he wants to use his hands. When Waldo asks about his head, Henry says: "It could be useful. For burrowing, perhaps. . . . I could beat it into a ploughshare." However, as the play progresses, the majority of Henry's comments become more politically charged, as opposed to just witty.

Near the end of the first act, when Sam tells Henry that he has to pay his taxes to support the war, Henry is furious, and tries to renounce his citizenship. Says Henry, "I wouldn't pay the tithe and tariff to the church, so I signed off from the church! Well, I'm ready right now, Sam, to sign off from the government. Where do I sign?" Henry's transformation in language reaches its climax at the very end of the act, in the last exchange. Waldo has come to the jail to confront Henry, and says: "Henry! *Henry*! What are you doing in jail? However, at this point, Henry is very politically charged, and does not balk from confronting his former mentor, who he feels should be in jail protesting with him: "(*Defiantly, pointing accusingly across Concord Square.*) Waldo! What are you doing *out* of jail?"

While the first act features some light, witty dialogue from Henry that slowly darkens, the second act is mainly serious, as evidenced by the opening scene. Lydian tells Henry that "in order to *get* along, you have to *go* along." Henry is disgusted at this idea of conformity, and shouts: "GO ALONG! GO ALONG! GO ALONG!" to show his rage. The second act also witnesses Henry's realization that, while witty language is fun, it is not always effective. When Bailey comes to him, nervous about his upcoming trial, he asks Henry to "Tell me what to do!" Henry responds: "Well, you might try getting yourself born in a more just and generous age. That's not a very practical suggestion." Although Henry's witty comments about alphabets and atheism worked in the beginning when the stakes were not as high, now he is dealing with a man's life, and he realizes that in such heady matters, humor does not always offer a practical solution.

In the end, after his nightmare, Henry trades in his witty dialogue for an activist's sense of purpose. The very end of the play, which is silent, offers a marked contrast to Henry's impassioned dialogue throughout the beginning of the story. The stage directions describe in detail how Henry "*seems to grow in stature, lifted and strengthened by a greater challenge,*" but Henry does not say anything. He has learned that actions speak louder than words, and is prepared to act.

The shift in Henry's style and frequency of speech mirrors the events in Henry's life, which also shift from the comedic and lighthearted to the tragic and purposeful. In the beginning of the play, when John asks Henry what he wants to do with his life, he says "I want to be as much as possible like Ralph Waldo Emerson." Henry is fresh out of school at this point, and thinks that he will be able to live his transcendental life without being greatly affected by other events. However, when Henry tries to pursue his vocation of teaching, he runs up against the strict requirements of the school, which include whipping the students when they misbehave. Reluctantly, Henry does this, but he is so disgusted with himself that he informs Deacon Ball he "has administered the

Sacrament of the Schoolroom; and he resigns as a 'teacher' in the Public Schools of Concord!" Since, at this point, the audience does not know the negative circumstances surrounding Henry's imprisonment, Henry's resignation from school becomes the first event that is portrayed as negative. It is followed by a series of events, which get progressively more tragic. The Transcendentalist school established by Henry and John fails when they lose all of their students. Henry tries and fails to explain the ideas of Transcendentalism and his love to the beautiful Ellen Sewell.

Then, the first major tragic event in the play happens, the death of John, an event that profoundly affects Henry. Once again, Henry employs his wit when he talks about the details that surround John's death, but it is anything but humorous. Says Henry to Ellen: "He had a glamorous death. Like the Knights of the Round Table who slashed at each other with rusty swords until they all died of blood poisoning." As Henry elaborates, he tells Ellen about the shaving accident that gave John his own blood poisoning: "John, three mornings ago, happened to think of something very funny while he was shaving. He burst out laughing, and cut himself." It is oddly fitting that John dies as a result of his laughter, since Henry learns throughout the play that too much humor without action can kill a person's effectiveness.

In the second act, Henry faces another death that affects him, the death of the escaped slave, Henry Williams. Henry Thoreau tries to explain the injustice of Williams's murder, and tells Waldo that his own policy of working within the system is not effective enough to save people like Williams: "When a man, at the border of freedom, is stopped by the rifle of a Boston policeman, he doesn't have time for Dr. Emerson's leisurely sermon on the 'slow evolving of the seasons.'" The same argument about Williams leads Henry to pressure Waldo to give a talk against slavery and the Mexican War. However, at the crucial moment, after Henry has already gathered a crowd, Waldo sends Lydian with a message, saying that "he wants more time to meditate on these matters . . . . So that he can write a careful essay setting forth his position." Following this betrayal, which wounds Henry deeply, he totally denounces Waldo: "My God, he was my god! No more! If he is the Deity, I am a doubter!"

Henry realizes that he must take matters into his own hands, but is unsure how to do that. All of these conflicting feelings manifest themselves in his nightmare, in which military members chant such things as "Hate-two-three-four!" and "Learn to kill!" underscoring the tragedy of the Mexican War that Henry wants to stop. Tragedy strikes in Henry's nightmare, too, as the little Drummer Boy (Waldo's son, Edward) is wounded, and Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry wakes up and realizes he needs to take action. All of the gradually more serious events have hardened Henry's resolve, a fact that is manifested by the change in his language, from witty and playful, to more politically active, to silent—letting his actions speak louder than his words. Of course, readers can make many other interpretations about the play, especially since the playwrights' dreamlike, expressionistic structure inspires very different experiences in each person. In the end, as Lawrence and Lee note in their foreword to the play: "It is eminently Thoreauvian that everyone should bring to—and take from—the play something uniquely his own."

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Guyette holds a bachelor of arts degree in English writing from the University of Pittsburgh. In the following essay, Guyette examines the theme of civil disobedience in Lawrence and Lee's play.

In their play *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee explore the issue of morality versus adherence to the law and what the conscientious course of action should be when a citizen comes into conflict with government actions he or she believes to be immoral. By dramatizing an actual event in the life of writer Henry David Thoreau, a man who personified the ideal of Americans as rugged individualists, the playwrights deliver an unambiguous message: If you believe a government's policies are wrong, then you have an ethical responsibility to oppose those acts, even if that dissent makes you a criminal in the eyes of the state.

As depicted by Lawrence and Lee, writer Henry David Thoreau was the quintessential nonconformist. A man who rejected the social conventions of his day, he gladly assumed the role of an outcast. Thoreau was, it seems, compelled to march to a drumbeat whose discordant rhythm was dictated solely by his own conscience and intellect. As portrayed in this play, a transforming moment occurred when Thoreau decided to face jail rather than support a war against Mexico he believed to be both illegal and immoral. Writing this play at the height of the U.S. war in Vietnam, Lawrence and Lee use events that occurred 125 years earlier to demonstrate that openly opposing government actions that an individual believes to be unjust is a time-honored American tradition.

The authors of the play certainly admire the young Thoreau, who rejected materialism and technological advancement by retreating to the unspoiled woods of Walden Pond. "He smelled the smog before we saw it," they wrote in an introduction to the play published in 1971. "It smarted his soul before it smarted our eyes." But they also saw the shortcomings of a life spent in seclusion and how a high-principled hermit may be nurturing his own soul but, by living in isolation, does nothing to help uplift his fellow man. For Thoreau to transcend that limitation and become a true hero, he had to give up the Eden-like tranquility of his beloved Walden. In production notes for the play, Lawrence and Lee explained it this way:

> Thoreau's decision to return to the human race is the shape, the parabola of the play: his evolution from withdrawal to return, the journey from hermitizing to social conscience. This is the subtext of the play.

The authors were not motivated to glorify events of the past. For them, the story of Thoreau's night in jail was a sort of parable, or lesson, that very much applied to their day and time—in fact, to any day and time. That concept is reinforced by the play's dreamlike qualities. Set in a jail cell, the story it tells knows no bounds. Characters come

and go, events from the past are conjured up, abandoned, and then revisited. At its heart, this is a very political play, written in response to the events of a turbulent time in American history. As the play's authors wrote, they saw Thoreau and his writings as the embodiment of an 'explosive spirit who addressed himself to the perils of our time with more power and clarity than most angry young men writing now about now." But as time has shown, like Thoreau himself, the issues this play raises are universal, and its message timeless.

The foundation of Thoreau's moral base is laid at the outset of the play. As in his real life, Thoreau is profoundly affected by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who comes to serve as the younger man's spiritual father. "Have you ever noticed, John," says the character Mother (who gets the order of things mixed up), "how much Mr. Emerson talks like our David Henry." Just as Emerson resigns from his position as church pastor when he cannot, in good conscience, perform the rites required by his congregation, Thoreau, likewise, leaves his job as a public school teacher rather than be fettered by the constraints of using only approved textbooks.

Nonconformist is the perfect word to describe Thoreau. "Henry," says Mother, "you have wits enough to know that, in order to get along, you have to go along." But that is something he will not, perhaps even cannot, do. When the law demands that a free man must turn in runaway slaves, should a person of conscience feel bound to be law abiding? For Thoreau, the answer to that question is a resounding "no." He quickly learns, though, that using principles rather than popular opinion as a personal compass comes with a price. It puts him decidedly outside the mainstream. For a man such as Thoreau, however, that price is readily paid. In his view, going along just to get along extracts a much higher toll than simple alienation from society. Henry sums up his view during a conversation with his fellow prisoner as they listen to the footsteps of a man walking outside the jail:

I know where he's going. He's going where he's supposed to go. So he can be where he's supposed to be, at the time he's supposed to be there. Why? So he'll be liked. My God, a whole country of us who only want to be liked. But to be liked, you must never disagree. And if you never disagree, it's like only breathing *in* and never breathing *out*!

That statement, in essence, is the key to understanding the character Henry. It is as if, by his very nature, he is physically incapable of following the rest of society in lockstep. Doing so would result in intellectual and spiritual suffocation. And for Henry, that would be a much harsher fate than merely being disliked. Or, as he comes to learn, being imprisoned.

In his biography of Thoreau, Edward Wagenknecht quoted a passage from the writer's seminal essay, "Civil Disobedience": "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly the true place for a just man is also in prison." That essay is credited with influencing

such leading advocates of nonviolent protest as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., both of whom endured incarceration rather than abide by laws they believed to be unjust. Likewise, Thoreau's willingness to be locked behind bars inspired Lawrence and Lee to dramatize that real-life incident, portraying it as a pivotal moment in the author's life. Until then, he was content to work as Emerson's handyman and gather huckleberries with young Edward, or tend his bean patch at Walden Pond. It is an idyllic life. Unshackled from material wants, he rejoices in the splendors of nature, living simply and freely. The fact that he is largely removed from the rest of the world troubles him not at all. While in jail, however, he has a dream that transforms him. As the playwrights noted: "His night in jail is a mystical experience for this highly sensitive man. Confined, he has the liberty to explore what he really *is.*"

Unlike his mentor Emerson, Thoreau cannot stand by silently as his nation wages an imperialistic war. In that belief, he is in good company. The playwrights quote a speech given by Abraham Lincoln who, as a young congressman from Illinois, had the political courage to swim against the tide of public opinion and condemn the Mexican War as both unnecessary and unconstitutional. Like Henry, he chose to adhere to the dictates of his conscience rather than follow the easier course of going along with the mainstream.

It is during his dream that Henry attempts to speak out but finds he has no voice. It is symbolic of his situation, and a direct result of the reclusive path he has taken to that point in his life. Unlike Waldo, who by virtue of his prominence can attract an audience and influence their thoughts, Henry, in essence, has no platform from which he can speak. He has not built the foundation for people to take him seriously and consequently is politically impotent. During times of moral crisis, dissenters need a voice that will be heard, otherwise their dissent is pointless. To emphasize the need for Henry to find his voice, Lawrence and Lee are unsparing in their depiction of war's horror. While most of the play is relentlessly stark, leaving the audience to fill in the blank spaces, the dream sequence is particularly graphic. The huckleberries may have been imaginary, but the uniforms and muskets are unmistakably realistic. There are explosions of gunfire, and the "sky seems ripped apart by psychedelic splattering of shrapnel." There is a reason Henry refuses to subsidize all this with his tax dollars: it is hell, and he will not play any part whatsoever in supporting it. However, as he stands there, holding the body of young Edward in his arms, he realizes that his quiet dissent serves no greater good. Walden, he admits to his cellmate Bailey, may indeed be heaven, but heaven is the realm of the afterlife. As he tells his new friend: "Bailey, I tried to escape. But escape is like sleep. And when sleep is permanent, it's death." Which is why, at the play's end, the lights do not dim as usual and Henry does not disappear behind a closing curtain. The morning sky is ablaze with newfound glory and Henry, having grown as a result of that night's mystical experience, is "lifted and strengthened" by the greater challenge upon which he is ready to embark.

Like Henry, the authors of this play wanted their audience to see the light. There is no doubt Thoreau's days as a recluse are over as he leaps from the stage to be among the people. The message is clear: for one to simply follow the beat of one's own different drummer is not always good enough, like when, as Henry ultimately learns, there is a

moral imperative to help others hear the same beat and then convince them to march alongside him.

Source: Curt Guyette, Critical Essay on *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Woods traces the development of The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail *and the significant changes made to its first version.*

In *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, Lawrence and Lee continued to explore the historic past through fiction in order to comment on the present, using Henry David Thoreau's own name and the names of his friends and fellow citizens of Concord. The play is based on Thoreau's actual incarceration when he refused to pay taxes that would go to support the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. Lawrence and Lee began work on the first draft of the play—originally titled *A Different Drummer*—in July 1966. Unlike their earlier collaborations, *A Different Drummer* initially was Lawrence's project alone. The first outline opens with the exchange that was eventually to conclude act 1:

VOICE [Emerson]: Henry, what are you doing in jail?
HENRY (*Clutching the bars and shouting back, like a whiplash*) Waldo! What are you doing out of jail???

This first version of the play employs a mock trial as the organizing focus, with figures from Thoreau's life being summoned to testify as Thoreau attempts to justify his actions. Lee's initial work on *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* was to serve as an editor, reacting to Lawrence's rough outline. The playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until April 1969.

As a result of the playwrights' consultations, *A Different Drummer* was rethought entirely, emerging not only with a new title, but with an entirely new structure. The jail setting remained as the focal point of the play, but the trial convention was abandoned, as was any pretense at strict chronology. Rather, Lawrence and Lee embraced a fluid structure reminiscent of expressionist theatrical experimentation earlier in the twentieth century.

Once the decision was made to adopt the new format, Lawrence and Lee's work on *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* progressed rapidly during the summer of 1969, and the finished and revised text was completed by early October. Submitted to the American Playwrights Theatre (APT), the play was quickly accepted for production. The pilot production opened at Ohio State University on 21 April 1970—fifteen years to the day after the triumphal New York opening of *Inherit the Wind*.

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail comments on contemporaneous events, as do most of Lawrence and Lee's plays. The parallels between Thoreau's passive resistance to the Mexican-American War, and the protests erupting across the United States in the late 1960s to the Vietnam War were obvious; and the playwrights fully intended the parallels to be seen. As early as 1967, they had noted that "the whole theme of the Thoreau piece should be the obligation to rebel non-violently. Not merely the right to rebel. But the necessity."

With Thoreau as the play's constant center, the events that shaped his political and intellectual growth swirl together as he attempts to understand what brought him to the Concord jail. Thoreau's memories climax in the phantasmagoric nightmare sequence that forms the heart of act 2. Ralph Waldo Emerson serves as an appropriate foil for Thoreau: the established intellectual leader with the moral power to provide leadership against the war who instead waffles, preferring ineffectually procrastinating discussion to direct action.

The contrast between Thoreau's activism and Emerson's failure to lead is doubled by the play's other characters, who provide different sorts of contrasts. Thoreau's cellmate, Bailey, is clearly a dramatic device, allowing Thoreau to explain his beliefs to a new person and to demonstrate his abilities as a teacher when, early in the play, he teaches Bailey to write his name. Henry's brother, John, doubles Thoreau in several ways, most significantly as Henry's surrogate in the unsuccessful wooing of Ellen.

Ellen herself is a foil for Thoreau. Not only does she articulate the comfortable bourgeois philosophy Thoreau rejects (particularly early in the play), she also displays the ability to learn and grow when she is able to articulate the key elements of Transcendentalism after John's death. Each of the minor figures reverses some element of Thoreau's character, whether it be the authoritarian pedagogical style insisted upon by Deacon Ball or Sam's unquestioning acceptance of the government's dictates.

Lawrence and Lee dramatized events in Thoreau's life that illustrated their central concerns. A brief analysis of the first act will demonstrate that it is carefully constructed to lead the audience through Thoreau's development. The play's structure appears casual and loose, although each detail carries a purpose and meaning.

Waldo's apparent age and confusion in the opening sequence establishes that the play's events will take place in fluid time; Waldo's self-centeredness, which motivates his reluctance to act, is also indicated here. Henry's exchange with his mother, which follows and overlaps the Waldo-Lydian scene, sets up immediately Thoreau's independence and self-reliance.

Thoreau's insistence upon being true to himself despite the conforming drive of society, is, of course, the central theme of the play. Henry's refusal to accept the traditional order of the alphabet, followed immediately by Waldo's "Cast Conformity behind you," reinforces his individuality. The short scene that follows with his brother, John, establishes Waldo's influence on Thoreau, as well as setting up his parallel reliance upon his brother. Both the intellectual and familial support will be wrenched away from Thoreau as the play progresses. Having Waldo's moment of self-doubt follow immediately after Henry's "I want to be as much as possible like Ralph Waldo Emerson" undercuts Henry's hero worship, letting the audience know instantly that Emerson will prove ineffective.

The play's first extended scene, Thoreau in the jail cell with Bailey, follows. Thoreau is on his own here. Although the audience does not yet know that John will be dead by the time Henry is jailed or that Waldo will have failed Thoreau as well, the first Bailey scene

shows the mature Thoreau. He fuses an awareness of the world of nature heightened by the Walden experience with a rejection of the political world of "a President who went out and boomed up a war all by himself—with no help from Congress and less help from me." The scene ends with Thoreau teaching Bailey to write his name and leapfrogs into Thoreau in his Concord classroom, where Deacon Ball forces Thoreau to face another consequence of the individual's freedom: the responsibility to refuse morally unsupportable orders. Thoreau's resignation as a teacher is paralleled directly by Lawrence and Lee with Emerson's resignation of his pulpit, also on a matter of conscience.

Henry and John's own school, in the following sequence, reinforces Henry's growing awareness of the natural world and also introduces Ellen and permits Henry to explain his self-directed teaching philosophy. Henry's rejection of learning in the jail cell sounds the first note of the Thoreau school's failure, which becomes clearer in the following long scene, in which Henry explores the possibility of traditional fulfillment through marriage. The rowing sequence with Ellen gives a further chance to explore his personal philosophy, while providing a sharp contrast between his behavior and the expected behavior of a polite middle-class suitor.

The jail cell, with Bailey's snore-response to Henry's question about marriage, provides the bridge to the next scene, the church service ultimately interrupted by Henry and his wheelbarrow working on Sunday, having taken the rest of the week off. John's recounting of Ellen's refusal is followed quickly by John's death and burial. Ellen's awareness of Transcendentalism demonstrates Henry's success as a teacher; but bereft of both John and Ellen, he turns to his second source of support, the Emersons, in the third major scene of the act. Walden is fully introduced in this scene, and the relationships between Henry and each of the Emersons are suggested. After a brief return to the cell, and Henry's mature reflection on what Walden has meant to him, the act's last major scene shows Henry's actual arrest and full explanation of why he refuses to pay his taxes. The act ends with the Henry/Waldo exchange that had opened the first version of *A Different Drummer* in Jerome Lawrence's original outline.

Although the structure of the first act of *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* is fluid, each of the elements dramatized has a specific purpose, culminating in Thoreau's arrest and then his challenge to Emerson, which ends the act. What appears on first viewing to be casual is, in fact, quite carefully plotted. The playwrights' success in capturing the mood of the late 1960s is clear not only in their use of the parallels between the Mexican-American and Vietnam Wars, but also in their contrast of the restrictive (and restricting) educational system represented by Deacon Ball to Thoreau's nature-centered approach. Thoreau's educational philosophy, as presented by the playwrights, is quite close to the alternative educational theories most forcefully articulated in the 1960s by A. S. Neill, Ivan Illich, and Jonathan Kozol.

The play also contributed significantly to the then-burgeoning regional theatre movement by its production through the American Playwrights Theatre, resulting in more than one hundred forty separate productions from 1970 through 1971. *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*'s message of individual responsibility remains current: the Hong

Kong Repertory Theatre performed it in the autumn of 1989 as a memorial to the Chinese students massacred in Beijing's Tiananmen Square when the People's Army brutally crushed the freedom movement in early June 1989.

Although widely produced across North America, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* was deliberately never performed either on or off Broadway, as the playwrights demonstrated that the theatre could be born and continue to live elsewhere than on a few blocks of Manhattan real estate. Even though the play is frequently produced, there has been little critical comment on the script. It many ways, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* has fallen victim to the cultural dominance of the American theatre by the New York stage: scripts receive little critical attention unless they have been successfully produced in full view of the national media, centered in New York City. Although there are some indications that this bias may be lessening, it remained strongly in place when *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* was first produced in 1970. Lawrence and Lee's examination of individual consciousness has gone virtually unremarked other than in newspaper accounts of the (literally) hundreds of individual productions.

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail remains in the world repertory. The play has historic significance as the greatest success of the American Playwrights Theatre, the organization founded by Lawrence and Lee in 1965 as a means of bypassing the harshly commercial conditions then beginning to dominate the Broadway stage. Headquartered at Ohio State University, where *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* was premiered, APT created the first truly national theatrical production mechanism seen in the United States. In significant ways, it fostered the growth of professional theatres outside New York City, helping to diminish the sole power of the Broadway stage. *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* was widely produced and highly successful across the country, with more than two thousand performances at APT-member theatres during its first two years alone. One scholar did note that "more people saw that play in one season than had seen . . . *Inherit the Wind* and *Auntie Mame* in their total combined runs." That *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* still has not attracted much scholarly attention must be seen as an ironic comment on the scholarly community's lack of awareness of changes in theatrical production patterns during the past two decades, as well as on scholars ignoring evidence beneath their very noses. More than twenty years after its premiere, the Bantam edition of *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* has almost a half-million copies in print.

Source: Alan Woods, "*The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail:* Introduction," in *Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee,* edited by Alan Woods, Ohio State University Press, 1995, pp. 447-506.

Topics for Further Study

Research the causes, conditions, and outcomes of the Mexican-American War, choosing one prominent military or political figure from both Mexico and the United States of America who took part in the conflict. Imagine that these two leaders have been invited to appear on a modern-day, televised debate show, to defend their viewpoints about, and actions during, the war. Write a short script or scenario that depicts what might happen during this debate.

Research the main beliefs of transcendentalists in the mid-nineteenth century, and the beliefs of hippies in the 1960s and 1970s. Putting yourself in the place of Henry David Thoreau, imagine that he has traveled through time to the early 1970s. Incorporating your research from both major belief systems, write a journal entry that describes how he might have contributed to or been affected by the Vietnam antiwar movement.

Freedom fighting is a common theme throughout human history. Pick a non-American, pre-1800s society that had to fight for its freedom, and research the history of the struggle, focusing especially on ways that this society fought against or protested its oppression. How do these compare to the methods used by Thoreau or the Vietnam antiwar movement? Discuss any significant figures who led the protest or fight.

In the play, Thoreau says at the end that he cannot afford to just stay at Walden anymore, and that he needs to be more active in his fight with society. Research Thoreau's life after the jail incident and use this information to discuss whether or not his efforts to effect change society were successful.

The expressionistic techniques that Lawrence and Lee used in their play were also prevalent in other visual arts in the twentieth century, such as painting and film. Choose a visual medium, and find an example of a work that you feel accurately represents at least one of the main themes of the play. Discuss the history behind the work, including how it was received.

Compare and Contrast

Mid-1840s: The United States engages in a brutal war in Mexico in an attempt to gain more land for America.

Late 1960s-Early 1970s: The United States engages in a brutal war in Vietnam in an attempt to stop the spread of Communism in southeast Asia.

Today: The United States engages in a war in Afghanistan, in an attempt to locate hidden terrorist groups.

Mid-1840s: The U.S.-Mexican War is started by President Polk with authorization from Congress. Polk says that Mexico's attack on American soil justifies the war, but the area of the attack is a disputed borderland, not officially recognized American soil. In addition, it is Polk's placement of American forces in this disputed borderland that prompts the Mexican army to attack.

Late 1960s-Early 1970s: Congress gives President Johnson unlimited powers to wage war in Vietnam, as the result of two alleged attacks on American naval destroyers in the region. Although one attack is later confirmed, the other is not. In addition, the ships, which Johnson claims are on routine missions in neutral waters, are actually on covert missions within enemy waters, which provokes the first attack.

Today: The War on Terrorism starts after the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D. C., are attacked by terrorists, who crash fueled commercial jetliners into the two structures. Much of this is captured on live television, and Americans widely support the moves by President Bush and Congress to begin and escalate a war on terrorism.

Mid-1840s: During the U.S.-Mexican War, many Americans in the northern states do not support the war. Thoreau is one of the notable cases of people who protest, in his case by refusing to pay taxes that help to support the fighting.

Late 1960s-Early 1970s: Many young American men protest against the Vietnam war by refusing to fight. Common methods of protest include burning draft cards and fleeing to other countries, although demonstrations—peaceful and violent—also increase.

Today: The American military experiences a surge in its ranks as patriotic men and women willingly join the fight against terrorism.

What Do I Read Next?

Mother Courage and Her Children, an antiwar play by German playwright, Bertolt Brecht, was originally published in 1949 following World War II. Like *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail,*

Brecht's tragic play is set in an earlier historical era, in this case seventeenth-century Europe, during the multinational Thirty Years' War. Brecht's play depicts the tragic figure of Mother Courage, whose attempts to make money from the war inadvertently kill all of her children.

Mother Courage and Her Children is available in a reprint edition from 1991, translated by Eric Bentley.

Ralph Waldo Emerson and his transcendentalist ideas were a strong influence on the life and works of Henry David Thoreau. In 2000, many of Emerson's major works were collected in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson.*

This book offers a great introduction to Emerson's teachings.

Lawrence and Lee's *Inherit the Wind* is the writing team's most successful play. In 1925, the state of Tennessee filed suit against Michael Scopes, a young teacher who was teaching evolution. The play, which was first published in 1955, dramatizes this famous trial, as an obvious commentary on the Communist "witch trials" that were being held by Senator Joseph McCarthy and others during the 1950s.

Harmon Smith's *My Friend, My Friend: The Story of Thoreau's Relationship with Emerson* (1999) details the historic friendship between the two writers, which lasted from Thoreau's Harvard days in the 1830s until Thoreau's death in the 1860s. Although this relationship has been explored by many scholars, Smith's engaging account, which includes many quotes from the journals of Emerson and Thoreau, offers new insights.

Thoreau's one night in jail eventually became the basis for his essay "Civil Disobedience," which was first published in 1849 as "Resistance to Civil Government." Although the work received little critical or popular attention at the time, it found an audience with twentieth-century readers. The essay was reprinted with Thoreau's other major essays in 1993 in *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays.*

Unlike "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods,* a collection of essays originally published in 1854, did find an audience during Thoreau's lifetime, although the book's sales did not really take off until it was reprinted shortly before Thoreau's death, at which point it was renamed, simply, *Walden.* Since then, it has sold millions of copies, achieved enormous critical success, and been translated into many different languages. *Walden* is currently available in a reprint edition from 1998.

Further Study

Burkett, B. G., *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation Was Robbed of Its Heroes and Its History,* Verity Press, 1998.

Burkett, a Vietnam veteran and reporter, was featured on the newsmagazine show "20/20" for this un-flinching look at the ways in which Vietnam veterans have been misunderstood, in part due to the actions of some who have tarnished the image of this generation. Exhaustively researched, the book helps to set the record straight about a very painful time in American history.

Eisenhower, John S. D., *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848,* University of Oklahoma Press, 2000.

Eisenhower's in-depth history of the Mexican War offers depictions of the major military leaders from the United States, some of whom featured prominently in the Civil War two decades later. The book also views the war in its historical context, addressing the different American viewpoints of those in the North and those in the South.

Field, Ron, *Mexican-American War 1846-48,* Brasseys, Inc., 1997.

This book offers a thoroughly illustrated history of the uniforms, equipment, and weapons of both the Mexican and American armies. From the American forces, the book covers United States Regulars, Texas Rangers, and Militia members. Although information on Mexican forces is rare, this book makes good use of the available resources.

Johannsen, Robert Walter, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination,* Oxford University Press on Demand, 1988.

Johannsen analyzes the Mexican War in view of the fact that it was the first foreign war that was heavily reported in the press. As such, it greatly affected the imagination of an America that was trying to find its identity. The book draws on a number of firsthand accounts and other original sources.

Kent, Stephen A., *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversion in the Late Vietnam Era,* Syracuse University Press, 2001.

At the same time that young Americans were engaging in the antiwar counterculture movement, many also chose to join alternative, and sometimes radical, spiritual groups and cults. Kent, a sociologist, presents the unique view that this often overlooked trend was motivated mainly by politics, not spirituality.

Leckie, Robert, *From Sea to Shining Sea: From the War of 1812 to the Mexican War, the Saga of America's Expansion,* Harper Perennial, 1994.

Leckie examines this rich period in America's early history as an independent nation. The shape of the modern continental United States was largely determined by the end of the Mexican War, and the book offers many anecdotes that illustrate the major events during America's territorial growth, including the major people involved in the expansion.

Martin, Susan, ed., *Decade of Protest: Political Posters from the United States, Viet Nam, Cuba, 1965-1975,* Distributed Art Publishers, 1996.

The United States was not the only nation that experienced massive antiwar protests among its citizens during the Vietnam War; many people in Vietnam and Cuba also protested the war. This unique book collects samples of the various protest posters that were produced in the three countries. The images are combined with essays that give background on the posters and the historical and cultural contexts in which they were created.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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