Walden Study Guide

Walden by Henry David Thoreau

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Walden was published in 1854, seven years after Henry David Thoreau ended his stay in a small cabin near Walden Pond. During those years, Thoreau painstakingly revised and polished his manuscript, based on journals he kept while living at the pond. He hoped his book would establish him as the foremost spokesman for the American transcendentalist movement.

In *Walden,* Thoreau condensed events of his twenty-six-month sojourn into one year, for literary purposes. He began and ended his narrative in spring. The eighteen chapters celebrate the unity of nature, humanity, and divinity□a central idea of transcendentalism□and portray Thoreau's life at Walden Pond as an ideal model for enjoying that unity. In solitude, simplicity, and living close to nature, Thoreau had found what he believed to be a better life. In *Walden,* he enthusiastically shares his discoveries so that others, too, may abandon conventional ways and live more sanely and happily.

Walden, however, was a gift more eagerly given than received. Despite some good reviews, the book did not sell well and did nothing to elevate Thoreau's reputation. *Walden* was the second and final book by Thoreau to be published in his lifetime.(His first book, *A Week on the Concord* and *Merrimack Rivers,* had been published at his own expense and also did not sell well.) It was not until the 1900s that Thoreau and *Walden* found a large, appreciative audience. The book was especially popular during the enforced simplicity of the Great Depression of the 1930s, and again during the 1960s when individualism, concern for the natural environment, and transcendentalism were important elements in a tidal wave of change that swept through American culture.

Author Biography

Henry David Thoreau was born July 12, 1817, in Concord, Massachusetts. His father, John, worked at various occupations, including farmer, grocer, and pencil manufacturer. His mother, Cynthia, was the daughter of a minister and ran a boarding house to supplement the family's income. Henry was the third of their four children.

Thoreau attended school in Concord and, with financial help from relatives, went on to Harvard University, where he graduated in 1837. By that time, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who would be Thoreau's lifelong mentor and friend, had moved to Concord. Emerson and Thoreau were members of a thriving group of transcendentalists that included Bronson Alcott (father of author Louisa May Alcott), Margaret Fuller, and others. (The core of transcendentalist philosophy is the idea that divinity and truth reside throughout creation and are grasped intuitively, not rationally.)

Rather than settling into one of the professions for which Harvard had prepared him, Thoreau moved from job to job, trying everything from teaching to being a handyman. He wanted time to walk outdoors, to think, and to write, and he was happy to live simply so that he could work little. He had a gift for surveying, an occupation that he enjoyed because it allowed him to be outdoors and to interact more with nature than with people. Throughout his life, when he needed to take temporary work to make money, Thoreau often turned to surveying.

By the early 1840s, Thoreau was regularly contributing poems and essays to *The Dial,* the transcendentalist journal edited by Emerson. Thoreau was living with Emerson and his wife at this time, doing chores and helping to run the household. In March 1845, Thoreau began building a cabin on land belonging to Emerson beside Walden Pond near Concord. He lived there from July 1845 until September 1847 and kept a journal□already a long established habit. After leaving the cabin at Walden Pond, he lived briefly in Emerson's home again (while Emerson was traveling overseas) and after that lived for the rest of his life in his parents' home. He never married.

In 1849, Thoreau published, at his own expense, his first book, *A Week on the Concord* and *Merrimack Rivers,* an account of a trip taken in 1839. The book was not a success; it took Thoreau several years to pay for its publication.

From 1847 to 1854, Thoreau revised and polished his manuscript for *Walden,* based on his journals. He hoped that this book would elevate his status as a writer and as a transcendentalist philosopher to the level that Emerson was respected. When it was finally published in 1854, however, *Walden* received a lukewarm response and did not sell well. In his later years, Thoreau turned his attention to writing against slavery.

Thoreau died at home in Concord on May 6, 1862, at the age of forty-four, of tuberculosis. He was little known and little mourned. Many of his neighbors in Concord and his literary peers saw him as an extremist, and he was often the object of insult and

ridicule. In his eulogy, Emerson rightly said, "The country knows not yet . . . how great a son it has lost."

Plot Summary

Chapter One: "Economy"

Thoreau begins by telling readers that he is writing to answer why he chose to live alone for more than two years in a small, simple cabin near Walden Pond. Much of the chapter is devoted to explaining that the way most people live, spending all their time and energy working to acquire luxuries, does not lead to human happiness and wellbeing. Thoreau writes that he prefers having time to walk in nature and to think much more than working long hours to pay for big houses, large tracts of land, herds of animals, or other property. He goes so far as to say that the ownership of such things is actually a disadvantage, as one who owns them must take care of them, while one who owns little has more freedom to do as he or she pleases. This is why Thoreau chose to live simply and cheaply in a house he built for himself: in simplicity and economy he found freedom. Finally, Thoreau describes how he built his house. He includes exact figures showing how much he spent on materials (twenty-eight dollars and twelve and one-half cents).

Chapter Two: "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For"

Continuing the idea set forth in the first chapter, Thoreau writes that he once considered buying a farm. He realized, though, that a person did not have to own a farm to enjoy those things about it that are most valuable, such as the beauty of its landscape. Thoreau concludes: "But I would say to my fellows, once for all, as long as possible live free and uncommitted. It makes little difference whether you are committed to a farm or the county jail." He urges his readers to simplify their lives as well so that they may live fully and freely.

Thoreau describes the area around his cabin and how much he enjoyed the peaceful natural surroundings. He answers the question why he lived there:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

Chapter Three: "Reading"

Here Thoreau makes a case for reading good books. He points out that the best books are "the noblest recorded thoughts of man" and that such books can take readers nearer to heaven. He complains that hardly anyone reads these books. Instead, he writes, people who are perfectly capable of reading the classics waste their time on unchallenging and worthless popular stories. He calls society to task for failing to be a "patron of the fine arts."

Chapter Four: "Sounds"

Thoreau writes that reading must be complemented by direct experience. This is in keeping with his transcendentalist philosophy, which emphasizes direct, intuitive experience of nature, truth and the divine.

In this chapter, Thoreau focuses on the sounds he experiences at Walden, from the singing of birds to the whistle of a train, and on how these sounds affect his mood. The sounds of animals especially cause him to feel the unity and joy of all things.

Chapter Five: "Solitude"

Thoreau makes his case that the companionship of nature is more fulfilling than that of humans, and that he could not possibly be lonely in nature because he is a part of it. The plants and animals are his friends and, amid the peace of nature, God himself is the author's visitor:

I have occasional visits . . . from an old settler and original proprietor, who is reported to have dug Walden Pond, and stoned it, and fringed it with pine woods; who tells me stories of old time and of new eternity; and between us we manage to pass a cheerful evening with social mirth and pleasant views of things.

Chapter Six: "Visitors"

Calling himself "no hermit," Thoreau writes that he did have visitors during his years at Walden. He describes at length a Canadian woodchopper who often did his work in the woods around Thoreau's cabin. Thoreau got to know the man and liked him because he lived simply and in harmony with nature. However, Thoreau eventually realized that "the intellectual and what is called spiritual man in him were slumbering as in an infant."

Other visitors included children, whom Thoreau liked for their innocence and enthusiasm, and "half-witted men from the almshouse." The latter, Thoreau writes, were in many cases wiser than the men who were running the town, and he "thought it was time that the tables were turned."

Chapter Seven: "The Bean Field"

The author describes his bean field and how he worked it. As usual, Thoreau gives both practical details and a mystical report of his agricultural project. He explains just how he worked his field and how much profit he made from it. He also asserts that the sun and the rain are the true cultivators and that woodchucks and birds have as much right to their share of the harvest as Thoreau has to his.

Chapter Eight: "The Village"

Thoreau often walked into the village, he reports, to hear just a little of its incessant gossip. A little news and gossip, he found, was entertaining, while more than a little numbed the soul. He did not like to stay long or to partake in too much of village life.

He reports that on one visit to the village he was arrested and put in jail (but soon released) for failing to pay taxes. He refused to pay, he explains, as a protest against the legality of slavery.

Chapter Nine: "The Ponds"

Most of this chapter is devoted to a detailed description of Walden Pond and the idyllic times Thoreau enjoyed in and around it. The author again describes the unity of nature, self, and divinity that he experiences there. He makes clear that the pond has a special kind of spiritual purity, calling it "God's Drop." He also describes other nearby ponds.

Chapter Ten: "Baker Farm"

This chapter contrasts Thoreau's joyful, contented, and easy life with the life of one of his neighbors in the woods, John Field. Field is an Irish laborer who works long days turning the soil for area farmers. Thoreau sees that Field works himself to exhaustion to pay the rent on his rustic hut and to feed his family. He explains to Field that there is another way to live□the way that Thoreau has chosen. Thoreau can see, though, that Field is not willing to give up the chase for "luxuries" such as coffee and beef, so he leaves Field alone, grateful that he himself has found a better way to live.

Chapter Eleven:"HigherLaws"

Like the last chapter, this one presents a basic contrast. First, Thoreau acknowledges his own animal instincts, apparent, for example, when he sees a woodchuck and is "strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw." Then he describes his spiritual instinct toward "higher" things. Both are to be accepted as part of human nature, he says, but as a person matures, the spiritual should wax while the animal wanes. In fact, Thoreau believes that the entire human race is evolving from animal to spiritual consciousness. Because killing and eating animals is an expression of the lower, animal instinct, Thoreau stopped hunting and ate very little meat or fish. "I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals," he writes.

Chapter Twelve: "Brute Neighbors"

Following what has become a pattern, Thoreau again takes up the same idea explored in the previous chapter, but explores it in a new way. This chapter begins with a dialogue between a Hermit and a Poet. Thoreau makes clear that these two characters represent himself and a visitor who used to come to his cabin. The gist of the dialogue is that the Poet□the visitor□tempts the Hermit to leave his meditations and go fishing. The Hermit wonders, "Shall I go to heaven or a-fishing?" and ends by going fishing. In this battle between the animal and the spiritual natures of man, the animal has won.

The rest of the chapter describes many animals that lived around Thoreau. In observing them, Thoreau concludes that both the animal and the spiritual natures coexist in animals and that animals experience no conflict between the two.

Chapter Thirteen: "House-Warming"

Thoreau prepared for winter by collecting wild apples, grapes, and nuts and by winterizing his house. He built a chimney (he had been cooking on a fire outdoors) and plastered his cabin to keep out the cold wind. By the time this work was finished, the pond was frozen, and Thoreau delighted in observing the ice itself and the bottom of the pond, which he could clearly see through the ice.

Chapter Fourteen: "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors"

In deep winter, nature slept and visitors rarely came to Thoreau's cabin. He acknowledges that this extreme solitude was a challenge. "For human society I was obliged to conjure up the former occupants of these woods," he writes.

The author tells about three former slaves and their homes in the woods; about the Stratton and Breed families, the latter ruined by rum; and about Wyman the potter and Hugh Quoil, an alcoholic who was said to have fought at the Battle of Waterloo. Walks in the dark, quiet winter woods, and the infrequent human visitors of winter are also recalled.

Chapter Fifteen: "Winter Animals"

Thoreau describes walking on the frozen ponds, from which he could see the woods at new angles, and his observations of wildlife in winter. Squirrels, rabbits, and other creatures lived around, under, and above his cabin, and he threw them corn and potato peels to help them through the winter.

Chapter Sixteen: "The Pond in Winter"

Thoreau recalls using his surveying skills to map Walden Pond and to measure its depth□one hundred seven feet. He tells of a large crew of laborers coming to harvest the pond's ice, which would be shipped to faraway places and sold. This idea of Walden being spread over the Earth is mirrored in Thoreau's writing. He read the Bhagavad Gita (a Hindu scripture) in the mornings, which made him think of "pure Walden water mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges."

Chapter Seventeen: "Spring"

The thawing of the pond and the stirring of animals signaled spring, and Thoreau reports that he felt in himself the same revitalization that he saw taking place all around him. Once again, he exults in nature. At the end of this chapter, Thoreau gives the date on which he left his life in the woods but does not say why he left.

Chapter Eighteen: "Conclusion"

Near the beginning of this chapter, Thoreau summarizes what he learned during his time in the woods:

If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him. . . . In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty, nor weakness weakness.

Thoreau ends his narrative by urging readers to apply to their own lives what he has shared with them. He counsels them to explore inner, rather than outer, worlds: "Be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought." He is confident that new ways of thinking will lead to new, fulfilling ways of living.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The opening chapter of *Walden* consists of Thoreau's criticism of the way that people lived in his day. With the second chapter, "Economy" creates the first of a series of structured paradoxes in the text. In "Economy," Thoreau analyzes the excess and complication of his contemporaries' lives.

The chapter opens with an anticipation of criticism of Thoreau's use of the first person. He endeavors to justify the accounts of his personal experiences by expressing that his neighbors and acquaintances showed an interest in his life at the time. People were asking him about every detail of his life, such as what he ate, how he felt, etc. He then proceeds to discuss the failure of his contemporaries to simplify their lives, addressing his readers intimately in his rhetoric to instill their sympathies for the "inhabitants." He also exercises his knowledge of classical literature to reiterate his argument with an analogy, comparing the lives that his friends and neighbors are trying to live daily with the twelve labors of Hercules.

The blending of classical references with those of every day experience continues in this chapter as Thoreau suggests that young men he sees inheriting everything, rather than working for and earning what they have, are at a disadvantage. These young men who have inherited farms and the like had a much easier time acquiring these things than they will have getting rid of them, and they are, in essence, now tied to working the land. Thoreau quotes a passage from "Metamorphoses" by Ovid, in its original Latin verse; followed by a translation by Sir Walter Raleigh: "From thence our kind hard-hearted is, enduring pain and care, approving that our bodies of a stony nature are."

The significance of this passage lingers in the context of the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha, who, being the last men on earth after the great flood of Zeus, repopulated the race of men by throwing stones over their shoulders. Thoreau alludes to the myth to express his belief that men in modern times, like Deucalion and Pyrrha, have become careless and insensitive to the world around them. Thoreau goes on to say that the chief problem is that most men are too concerned with petty worries and tedious work to remember that they are ignorant, which is what they need to remember in order to grow.

Despair is the condition, Thoreau then concludes, in which most men continue to live; he calls this a quiet desperation or resignation. Thoreau develops his position by arguing that the things man sees as pastimes and such are actually symptoms of despair. The principle metaphor is of a fire. Thoreau suggests that men feed the fire with those doings that men feel – Thoreau believes falsely – are necessities of life. Thoreau makes an example of the supposed need for men to eat meat; Thoreau questions this with the analogy of a farmer who states the case by saying that a diet without meat gives us nothing to make bones with. Thoreau's contradiction, presented almost in a

manner that mocks the farmer, calls up an image of the farmer walking behind an oxen with vegetable-made bones. It is easy to identify the loaded parts of this phrase.

The next key section begins with Thoreau's supposition that we can safely trust a lot more than we do, upon which he elaborates to say that nature is adapted to man's weaknesses as well as his strengths. A quotation from Confucius, the Chinese philosopher and teacher, concludes the paragraph and confirms that the argument that Thoreau has presented here is more than one man's speculation. Thoreau attempts to establish what is "necessary" of life in the following paragraphs. Then, he begins to recount something of his own life, although the details that he gives in this respect should not necessarily be considered autobiographical. Having established what the "necessary" parts to life are, Thoreau discusses the particulars. Clothing is one of his principle topics in the next section. He feels that clothing emulates a person's character; so much so that tasks that require new clothes should not be undertaken because it is a sign that the undertaking actually requires one to be a different person.

Shelter is the next topic and a condition that, Thoreau does not deny, is a necessity of life, although he tempers his admission with the recollection that "people have gone without shelter in colder countries than this for longer periods of time. Then, with references to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, Thoreau draws a parallel between them both and children, in which the reader may see Adam and Eve as symbolizing the childhood of mankind; the parallel establishes that it is instinct which drives every child to find a first primitive shelter from the elements; even though they love to stay outside, no matter what the weather. To encourage the reader to draw upon personal experience, Thoreau reminds us of the excitement many of us felt as children as we explored caves and rocks. Thus, he demonstrates that to seek shelter is natural, and because it is so, shelter must be a necessity of life; though, as Thoreau considers next, only a slight shelter is necessary, rather than an elaborate, expensive house.

To impart the perceived superfluity that is an investment in a large shelter, Thoreau turns to a colloquial expression and considers the roots of the words. He queries why a man with income enough to pay "country rates" of rent, which presumably were lower than the rates in towns, is called a "poor civilized man"; a "savage," who owns none of the luxury items listed by Thoreau is nonetheless considered rich in his savagery. Thoreau's conclusion here is that men must realize civilization is a sign of the progress of man by producing better dwellings at less cost. Society, he argues, must create a preference for modest houses. Thoreau begins to recount his expedition to Walden Pond, which, he writes, occurred in March 1845. As Thoreau develops something of an annual cycle in *Walden*, it is important for the reader to take note that Thoreau records the beginning of his experiment as springtime. He continues to relate the details of his expedition, in terms of the tools that he used to create his cabin on Walden Pond. As well befits the chapter, Thoreau also recreates calculations of the cost of building and other materials, his food and his total profit from his farm. He lists his furniture to emphasize the apparent simplicity of his lifestyle at Walden.

At the conclusion of the first chapter, Thoreau finally expresses his hypothesis for his Walden experiment. It is his belief that to be self-sufficient is not a hardship, but a good

way to live, if we live in a simple, wise manner, a conclusion he has reached through faith and experience. This also summarizes Thoreau's approach to his hypothesis; the blending of faith, or the quotations and paraphrases of other philosophers and writers in whose intellectual superiority and value the reader, and presumably Thoreau, has faith; and Thoreau's own experience, based on his observations of life around him. Thoreau thus leaves the reader in no doubt about the direction of his narrative as an introduction to his work.

Chapter 1 Analysis

In "Economy," Thoreau uses rhetorical devices and imagery to enhance the perception that people ignore the spiritual aspects of life. He draws analogies throughout the chapter to suggest that the spiritual relates closely to the natural world; spiritual dissatisfaction is the consequence of ignoring the natural world, as Thoreau believes the majority of his contemporaries do.

He finds justification for drawing so heavily upon his personal experiences in this chapter, too. Thoreau offers many instances to suggest that he is seeking a higher form of truth. His quest for such truth, he argues, confines him to his personal experiences. It is important to remember, noting this, that the nineteenth century literary tradition largely favored the use of the third person narrative voice.

"Economy" contains perhaps one of the best examples of Thoreau's use of classical authors, figures and texts to validate his own work: his suggestion that men create tasks for themselves as great as the twelve labors of Hercules. In legend, they were of monumental proportion, and the image of Hercules, the Greek hero and son of Zeus, creates ample emphasis of his argument by association.

Finally, it is necessary to observe in this opening chapter a constant feature of the whole text. Thoreau uses a persona in *Walden* that is meant to separate Thoreau from the man as much as any author writing in the third person. In recognizing this, the reader shows a degree of scrutiny; Thoreau's accounts cannot be accepted as outright truths, even though he gives the impression that he draws from experience rather than imagination. He is, as all writers do, working to shape the reader's perception of his words. In a sense, the repetition that Thoreau uses in his phrases, "for a long time I was," and "for many years I was," is enough evidence to suggest that he structures his narrative to emulate a poetic style.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

After arguing that his contemporaries live unhealthy, unsatisfying and unpractical lives of excess, Thoreau begins his explanation, in the second chapter of *Walden*, of how he believes men should live their lives. Based upon his personal experiences, of course, the title of the second chapter, identified by some critics as clichéd, emulates the personal tone that contrasts to the almost academic and theoretical, used in "Economy." It is the first of several paradoxes in style, tone and subject.

Thoreau describes his method of searching for a place to live, to conduct his experiment in leading a simple life. Thoreau presents himself as the wanderer, walking all around the area of where he lived. He avoided ownership of land, going so far as to say he didn't ever want possession of land to burn his fingers. The extremity of the image that possessing land would burn his fingers, "burned" being a relatively brutal term, suggests the degree of revulsion that Thoreau feels for the situation. Then, he admits that despite this dislike of actually material ownership of land, there was a place that called Hollowell Farm that he considered owning; but, seemingly to deflate the contradiction, the hypocrisy of this situation in the context of Thoreau's earlier statement that possession would have "burned" his fingers, he emphasizes the natural qualities of the farm. The "river" as its natural boundary and defense line, the "gray" color, the "ruinous" and "dilapidated" state of the house and fence respectively; Thoreau seems to regard all of these elements as immensely positive.

The chapter describes his discovery of Walden Pond, incorporating into a general description of its location a style that is in many ways reminiscent of the Romantics style and language usage. Thoreau also writes of his sensitivity to the natural environment, which he also personifies in the chapter. He suggests that he transcended time and space to become more closely connected to distant times and places. The simplicity of his life allowed him to feel as though he is with nature, he writes, paralleling his activities in the woods with spiritual activities.

The concluding pages of the chapter feature Thoreau's expansion of his argument that a simple life affords men a certain satisfaction. He thus attempts to show how the society of men can lead simpler lives to gain satisfaction.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The second chapter introduces a tone that is conversational. Thoreau's language and rhetorical style also emulate those used in the Romantic Movement, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The principle image of Thoreau "seated by the shore of a small pond" is sufficiently evocative of the Romantic painters' classic portrayal of the wanderer, and the evocation of such a cultural and literary association is notable at this

point because of the intellectual authority and dimension that it adds to the text. Secondly, it is significant because it reiterates the poetic nature of Walden. By drawing parallels with literary traditions and specific works, such as Ovid's *Metamorphes*, which he mentions several times in the text, Thoreau distinguishes *Walden* as a literary text rather than a scientific documentation of "Life in the Woods." For the same reason, Thoreau revised the title of *Walden* after its initial publication. He requested that his publishers remove the subtitle of "Life in the Woods."

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

In the third chapter, "Reading," which creates another paradox alongside the fourth chapter, "Sounds," Thoreau opens the discussion of, as he writes in the chapter's opening sentence, how men, can be both observes and students if they would be a little more deliberate in their choices. The implication throughout *Walden* is, of course, that Thoreau is both.

Thoreau discusses the nobility of "true" books. The entire chapter is an exercise in dramatic irony. Considering that he addresses a readership, he is vaguely obsequious: presumably Walden is a "true" book. His readers are thus embarking on a "noble," or refined, undertaking.

Thoreau feels that books should be read with the same deliberation and thought in which they are written. He advocates comprehension of language that surpasses a familiarity with language, and he tries to explain it by providing examples of people understanding a language and yet remaining isolated from the literature written in it, such as the men who spoke Greek and Latin in the middle ages and yet did not read the classic works that were written in their time in their language.

He distinguishes those books that are good to read, which enhance the reader's experience with their aesthetic value; and contemporary literature much of which he considers "cheap." Thoreau compares appreciating books to appreciating architectural monuments. Books, as much as monuments, he believes, should be viewed as treasured wealth. The repetition of the word "book" in this passage emphasizes the argument by stressing the chief subject of the comparison.

The criticism that follows concerns the books that people most commonly choose to read: the anthology series, such as the "Little Reading." Thoreau argues that people are too limited in their reading; ignoring the literature of the non-Christian tradition. Yet, people do not read enough of the English classics either, he concludes. It should be possible, he suggests, to educate people in Concord as well as in Paris or Oxford.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond demonstrates that he is both a student and an observer of the natural world. The references to classical literature, to etymology, and dissected puns, and the detailed descriptions of the natural world, demonstrate that he paid keen attention as both.

He introduces an important theme in this chapter: the method and nature of observation and study, which is central to *Walden*. Thoreau integrates details of the natural world into every section of the text. Simultaneously, he demonstrates that he is a cultured

intellectual, well read and liberal minded. A symbolic blend of the seemingly simple (natural) with the seemingly complex (higher learning) is the result. When Thoreau later stipulates that intellectual inquiries require simplification, he has already prepared the reader to accept this argument, and his applied logic.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Following the exposition on the importance of attending to the written word in the chapter "Reading," Thoreau introduces a paradox in the next chapter, "Sounds," emphasizing the value of listening to the natural and man-made aspects of the world, having confirmed, in the previous chapter, the value and importance of reading.

Thoreau presents sounds as the language through which all things speak. He writes about the sunlight streaming through his window, the songs of birds and the fluttering of birds through his cabin. To contrast this, he then mentions the sound in the distance of a wagon on the highway.

By paying attention to the sounds all around him, Thoreau asserts that his life never without amusement. He describes the location of his house and lists the wildlife and plants that are in the vicinity; Thoreau's specificity and exactness when identifying the local vegetation demonstrates his vast knowledge of botany. He was a surveyor by profession for much of his life, and maintained an interest in natural sciences throughout his life.

Thoreau continues to relate the natural to the modern world in the chapter. He writes about his observations as he sits at his window one summer afternoon, watching hawks and pigeons. He mentions, also, hearing a nearby railroad car, which was certainly a relatively recent development, and one that was controversial in Thoreau's day.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Perhaps the best example of the paradoxical blend of the natural and the modern in this chapter is Thoreau's portrayal of meeting the train's line of cars. He compares their movement to the motion of the planets, or of a comet. The train he compares to an "iron horse," an oxymoron in which the language emulates the paradox. He creates several more significant metaphors and similes that achieve the same end.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In "Solitude," Thoreau explores his life at Walden Pond in the context of the physical distance that the place afforded him from society. One of the questions that he said his neighbors asked him was if he was ever lonely. It is in this chapter that he answers that question.

The chapter opens in the same manner as those before it; Thoreau addresses his subject at his leisure, beginning instead by observing the effect of visitors: the gifts that they leave for him, such as cards or flowers, and the tracks that they inadvertently leave, like disturbed grass, footprints, or discarded flowers.

Thoreau explains that his closest neighbor is a mile away, and no homes are easily visible from his. This afforded his imagination a freedom that allowed him to imagine that he was in a wilderness, or, in essence, that he could be anywhere he imagined.

He describes how the solitude allowed him to feel a compelling bond with nature, as if the sun, moon and stars were his and his alone. Although he admits at one point that it was sometimes unpleasant to be alone, he continues by explaining that his solitude enabled him to better appreciate nature. He makes the realization suddenly, as if it has been through ignorance that he had not realized the benefits of the society of nature before.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The purpose of the chapter is to educate the reader that it is not a necessity to have the society of men, and Thoreau holds to this by repeatedly emphasizing the qualities of Nature. The notion that he has is somewhat reminiscent of the Romantic Movement. Thoreau again presents himself as a very spiritual entity, with a commanding authority over the natural world and, by implication, superiority over his fellow men. However, *Walden* reiterates many of the themes of the Romantic Movement. These included nature, spirituality, the individual, wandering and, in particular, searching: a longing for something more meaningful in life.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Thoreau discusses his encounters with men, women and children who came to visit him at Walden Pond, having described his "solitude" in the previous chapter. Having glorified it in the previous chapter, he begins the next chapter by saying that he believes he is as fond as society as most people. He mentions the three chairs in his house to lead into his subject gradually. There were three chairs, "one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society." He reckons that there were as many as 25 or 30 in his cabin at any one time.

The "inconvenience" that Thoreau introduces at this point is the inability in such a small house to put enough distance between himself and his guests to for them to say big words and have big thoughts. Thoreau suggests that there is a need for thoughts to radiate, to travel through space, which makes it a "luxury" for Thoreau to speak to a visitor across the pond, presumably because of the space it allows his thoughts.

He says that he had more visitors during the time he live in Walden than at any other time in his life; as he prepares to give some description of his visitors, it is the type of visitors that Thoreau is concerned with. "A Canadian – a woodchopper" is the principle character that he describes in this context: "a true Homeric or Paphlagonian man." Thoreau explains his interest in the man stems from the fact that he was very quiet and solitary – and completely happy. This made him an enigma to Thoreau and an important subject for him in light of his experiment at Walden Pond.

The final section of the chapter addresses the subject in a more general way. Thoreau does not focus upon one individual to convey an abstract opinion, but instead shifts into a descriptive style to describe the people who actually ventured to Walden Pond to visit him.

Chapter 6 Analysis

"Visitors" is the first of a series of chapters that present secondary characters. Heretofore, the principle character is Thoreau's narrator, the persona that the author models upon his self-perspective, as it were. The author's method of portraying characters other than his narrative persona is worth mentioning. He does not introduce the Canadian woodchopper, for example, as a rounded character. The details that Thoreau gives about the man are scarce; they are his origin and his profession, and his general mannerisms. The reader then receives the impression that the character is idiosyncratic, obscure in many respects. The limitations make the character seem more colorful and interesting to the reader than he would if portrayed in great detail. Thoreau is keenly aware that less is more when presenting secondary characters and he repeats the technique of limitation with other characters.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Thoreau has mentioned his bean field before: in "Solitude," he mentions that he spent the summer tending to his crop of beans. In the chapter, Thoreau draws attention to this work, which he calls "steady," "self-reflecting," and "Herculean."

As if to demonstrate what he could learn by tending to beans, he alludes to a memory of passing by Walden Pond when he was four years old. In the present day, Thoreau felt his efforts in the bean field displayed his love of the land. The crops that he raised were apparently of interest to passers-by, and Thoreau mentions this detail to illustrate another point – that the crops he raised were a link between cultivation and the wild. He suggests that his methods of farming were natural by repeating what apparently was the criticism of passers-by, that he did not, for example, use manure as a fertilizer.

Thoreau is perhaps suggesting in this chapter that he was able to sustain a meaningful relationship with Nature by raising, in this case, beans, naturally. "It was a singular experience," he says, "that long acquaintance which I cultivated with beans." He calculates the cost of purchasing the seeds, presumably to maintain a consistent attitude to his experimentation.

Chapter 7 Analysis

"The Bean-Field" is a chapter related to the previous chapter, "Visitors," and the next chapter, "The Village." It discusses Thoreau's relationship with nature in one sense, and details some of his encounters with passers-by, as "Visitors" does. It is also paradoxically associated to "The Village" based on the difference of the locations; the one being remote, the other communal; but both, interestingly, man-made.

When Thoreau describes how he tended to the bean-field, he compares his activities to acts of war. He alludes to the dews and rain as his "auxiliaries," making enemies of the worms and woodchucks; then, he speaks of leveling the "ranks" of weeds. The metaphor suggests that Thoreau had to fight for the bean-field, and the survival of his crops, as if it were territory at the center of a military conflict.

The reference to the labors of Hercules in "Economy" was in a negative context. In this chapter, Thoreau compares his work raising a bean crop to the Herculean labors to explore what is the right kind of labor. His language and expression becomes suddenly very positive; he says he loves and cherishes his rows of beans. He explains that his labor was a strange one, but satisfying nonetheless, although what he could learn from beans, or beans from him, was apparently a pressing question.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Thoreau did not, despite his sporadic claims, live a life of solitary confinement at the cabin by Walden Pond. He did, as the eighth chapter demonstrates, visit a nearby village regularly, he claims, to hear some of the local gossip. However, in the first paragraph of this chapter, Thoreau attempts to inject a purpose of observation into his visits, comparing his forest hikes to observe birds to his trips to the village to observe people.

He describes the men that he sees in the street sunning themselves while sitting on ladders or leaning against barns. Thoreau associates these men with the outdoors, and thus also Nature; he calls them "worthies," suggesting how highly Thoreau regards the men. In discussing the pastime of gossiping, Thoreau creates a metaphor of a mill. The men in the street are the most basic mill, in which the gossip is first "digested and cracked up."

Thoreau identifies the grocery store, post office and bank as necessities of a village and discusses the layout of the village. Thoreau uses a paraphrased quotation from Confucius to express a point: "The virtues of the superior man are like the wind; the virtues of a common man are like the grass; the grass, when the wind passes over it, bends." Thoreau's superior approach to life causes the common men of the village to show him a great deal of respect, in a manner that prompts them to display a superior attitude.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Ultimately this chapter demonstrates a part of Thoreau's experiment: his observation of the most basic components of life. He desires to learn the way that life may be simplified. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the way that simplicity might be introduced into communal life. As mentioned, Thoreau regards his time at Walden Pond as an experiment, not as a permanent solution to the problem of living life so as to attain spiritual satisfaction. At the end of the chapter, Thoreau concludes that his house was the most respected in the area because he never locked his doors.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

In the ninth chapter, Thoreau begins to develop one of the structures of the work that reflects one of the central themes of the text. Although Thoreau resided at Walden Pond for two years, two weeks, and two days, *Walden* only seems to consider the cycle of one year; beginning and ending in spring. "The Village," "The Bean-Field," and "Visitors" are set in the winter season. "The Ponds" begins to shift away from the winter season. The focus of the chapter is the life of Walden Pond, with scattered references to two other ponds in the area that Thoreau visited: Flints' Pond and White Pond.

Thoreau argues in the opening that nature does not yield to society. Then, he shifts his subject to Walden Pond by describing his fishing expeditions, writing of his spending his evenings sitting in a boat playing the flute, and passing the time fishing by moonlight.

The scenery of Walden Pond then becomes Thoreau's subject, and his principle concern is with describing the perception of colors in the water of the pond. He discusses the fact that, when looking directly down into water from a boat, it appears to be many different colors, but when a single glass of the pond's water is held up to the light it is colorless. Then Thoreau mentions the White Pond, and draws various parallels to emphasize the quality of the pond.

The fluctuation of the pond, Walden Pond, Thoreau describes to develop themes of the natural cycle of time. Thoreau explains the "rise and fall of Walden"; the effect that the increased water level had upon the surrounding vegetation. He records the fluctuating temperatures of the pond and also some details of the resident fish. Thoreau's next focal point is the shore, which he describes as "irregular enough not to be monotonous." He writes about the "deep bays, the bolder northern, and the beautifully scalloped southern shore."

The final paragraph of the chapter contains yet another example of Thoreau's poetic language and rhetorical style. He compares the White Pond and Walden Pond crystals on the face of the earth. The comparison between the ponds and crystals is one that suggests the ponds are precious, beautiful and rare, like crystals.

Chapter 9 Analysis

In "The Ponds," Thoreau's perception of nature is overwhelming. Throughout *Walden*, Thoreau is attempting to encourage the readers to perceive it in a particular way: as a divine force and the key to human spirituality and satisfaction. In the context in which he explores this, he demonstrates his rejection of the material and commercial world and insists that no human truly appreciates Nature; an ironic statement given that Thoreau has emulated such an awareness and appreciation for nature.

The purpose of the detail with which Thoreau mentions the natural elements in this chapter is clearly that Thoreau wants the reader to be aware of his attention to detail, which has a general significance in his philosophy. By demonstrating that he is so aware of the natural world, Thoreau is also proving that his experimental life of simplicity is extremely beneficial for his spiritual well being. The remainder of the chapter shows this.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The "Baker Farm" chapter opens with descriptive narrative of Thoreau's exploration of nature in the immediate proximity of his residence at Walden Pond; the style is somewhat typical of nineteenth century writers. It draws attention to Thoreau's relationship with nature and the way in which he almost personifies it. The opening also reveals something of Thoreau's manner of worshiping nature, of presenting it as something like a divine force and comparing nature to a shrine.

Although there is little suggestion of Thoreau's purpose in the opening, the chapter concerns Thoreau's observation of and interaction with John Field, the resident of a farm that was close to Walden Pond where John, an Irishman, lived with his wife and several children. Thoreau describes John Field as, "an honest, hard-working, but shiftless man," who Thoreau tried to help with his "experience." Thoreau uses his apparent relationship with Field to explain how people can apply Thoreau's experience of living the life of simplicity that he has described in the previous chapters to life in general.

Thoreau reports the advice that he gave to Field. He explains how he economized with his food, doing without tea, coffee, butter, milk or fresh meat. Then, he clarifies something regarding America's national identify by stating that "the only true America" is the one in which a man is free to pursue a life in which they may do without these items; Thoreau believes it is more trouble to be able to afford them than they are worth.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The ways in which Thoreau presents himself interacting with residents is noteworthy; the residents of Baker Farm are Thoreau's principal focus in this chapter. His report of how he imparted advice to the farmer, John Field, demonstrates an interesting technique. Field himself has no mode of expression, of response to Thoreau's advice. The reader, therefore, shares the farmer's position and, of course, receives the advice from Thoreau, in the same way as the farmer received it. However, by having no reckoning of the farmer's perspective, the reader is inclined, by the technique of reporting that Thoreau has used, to accept the advice that he gives; firstly, because of the context of *Walden* as a whole, but secondly, because the reader must be inclined to believe that the farmer also accepted it.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

"Higher Laws" is a chapter concerned with the choices of diet, and the blending of an instinct that longs for a spiritual life and a more primitive one. The discussion focuses around hunting; Thoreau's conclusion is that the consumption of animal flesh is unclean. The necessity to catch, clean, and cook meat in order for it to be eaten is not worth the trouble. To counter that argument that to eat meat is, in fact, a natural state of man, Thoreau concludes that the "repugnance to animal food is not the effect of experience, but is an instinct," and that ultimately, to keep one's self in the best condition, it is best not to consume animal food – or much of any food, for that matter. Thoreau sights the examples of the butterfly, which devours food as a caterpillar, only to eat much less in its more beautiful and developed form. Insects, Thoreau cites, eat much less in the developed state than in that of the larvae. The gluttonous maggot eats less when it becomes a fly. Ultimately, Thoreau concludes in "Higher Laws" that one should be taught to eat a more natural and wholesome diet.

Taste is another aspect that Thoreau explores, and he quotes The Great Learning, attributed to Confucius, "one eats, and one does not know the savor of the food," to enhance his opinion that it is neither the quantity nor the quality of food that creates taste and allows man to appreciate what they are eating; but it is the "sensual" flavors. By this, Thoreau encourages the reader to favor simplicity in diet, to purify and thus to devote one's self to a spiritual life.

Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter contains perhaps the most famous, and most shocking statements that Thoreau makes in *Walden*. The opening sentence is one of Thoreau's best uses of language; perhaps Thoreau's most effective attempt to emulate a connection with Nature; the basic, even savage, instinct of man, which plays such an important role in Thoreau's philosophy. Thoreau alludes to fishing again, mentioning his "string of fish," of course. The references to this and to the "dark" create impressions of suspense, and of the hunt. Then, the words "glimpse" and "stealing" compliment these impressions, as they follow the same degree of wariness and fear; fragility caused by the potential danger of the hunt. Thoreau writes his temptation to "seize" and "devour" the woodchuck, which is shocking to the reader because it is an expression of a savage desire and hunger, metaphorical and, although Thoreau denies it, probably quite literal as well. This opening, like "Higher Laws" in general, demonstrates Thoreau's belief that man's basic instincts are the most valuable asset, and when utilized, allow for a higher degree of spiritual satisfaction.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

"Brute Neighbors" offers a change of style and pace in its opening section. Thoreau presents a conversation between himself and his friend Ellery Channing. Thoreau is the "Hermit" whilst Channing is the "Poet." The rest of the chapter concerns the "neighbors," the animals that reside in the neighborhood of Walden Pond.

In the opening reported dialogue between Thoreau and Channing, the speaker, Thoreau, is curious about life in the world, which is what he calls the local community; the local village, the reader might assume, which has already been the subject of a chapter in *Walde*n. He asks questions about the activities of others to himself; Channing, then arriving on the scene, describes the day. Again there is the suggestion of the two men going fishing for their dinner. The purpose of the dialogue is apparently to draw the reader further into Thoreau's interaction with others. The reader becomes an audience of the immediate drama of the reported conversation between Thoreau and Channing. Positioned as it is in the text as a whole, the dialogue serves to recapture the reader's attention, or at least to renew it in the narrative as a whole.

Thoreau returns to his narrative after the exchange, which is relatively short, and describes the wildlife in the vicinity of his residence at Walden Pond. He poses the question, "Why has man just these species of animals for his neighbors; as if nothing but a mouse could have filled this crevice?" By exploring the behavior of animals in the wild Thoreau, endeavors to demonstrate the natural relationship between them and humans; presumably also examining the parallels between their modes of life, wherein simplicity is beneficial. Thoreau observes, for example, "It is remarkable how many creatures live wild and free though secret in the woods, and still sustain themselves in the neighborhood of towns." The expression that they live "wild" and "free" emphasizes two of the qualities that Thoreau wants to incorporate into the life of common men, as it creates spiritual purity and satisfaction.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Thematically, it is interesting to note that Thoreau mentions times of year: the months of June and October, and the fall. The repeated reference to this natural cycle is important because it reiterates one of the ideas that Thoreau is attempting to develop. As mentioned before, the cycle is one of the themes that structures *Walden*. Another theme that Thoreau repeats in this chapter relates to a warlike behavior, expressed in his word choices. For example, Thoreau writes: "the waves generously rise and dash angrily, taking sides with all waterfowl." The verbs used in this sentence, "rise" and "dash," along with the notion of "taking sides," all communicate aggression; here, a warlike aggression on the part of nature. Thoreau also refers to an "adversary's checker." The point that Thoreau illustrates by creating an impression of a war existing in nature

corroborates the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest. Although Darwin published his influential work, "The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection" in 1859, the theory of evolution was by no means new; many other individuals had published works on the theory, and probably Thoreau, as an enthusiastic scientist, was familiar with them.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Thoreau describes the onset of winter. He begins with a reference to October on the opening page of the chapter; alluding to such recognizable images of the approach of winter as chestnuts piled in storage. He writes about the signs of winter that he observed, including the changing shades and colors of trees. Thoreau compares the array of colors in the trees with paintings in an art gallery where the "manager" in charge of changing the art is presumably nature itself; a force that Thoreau often personifies in *Walden*.

Having discussed the changes prevalent in nature as the winter approaches, Thoreau explains the precautions that he took in preparation for the harsh New England weather. He mentions that he built a chimney, studying masonry to do so, and moreover, plastered the house, although he never thought the house looked as good after it was plastered. He goes on to say, "I first began to inhabit my house, I may say, when I began to use it for warmth as well as shelter." It is typical of Thoreau to define the precise purpose of his house, to provide "shelter" and "warmth." He continues, in the remainder of the chapter, to describe that effect of the winter weather upon the ponds; citing, for example, the dates that the various ponds in the vicinity of his cabin, froze during the winters that he resided in his Walden cabin. He also mentions his use of wood for fuel, and explains that for the second winter he had purchased a little cooking stove for economy's sake.

The chapter ends with Thoreau's quotation of the poem, "The Wood Fire," by American poet, Ellen Sturgis, which was published in the first issue of the Transcendentalist journal, "The Dial," founded in 1840 by Ralph Waldo Emerson. The poem, which warrants mention, personifies fire, a fire in the hearth of a home, and also attributes to it an almost life-giving force. The subject of the poem is appropriate given the subject of Thoreau's narrative towards the end of the chapter – his use of fuel for warmth.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The title of the thirteenth chapter offers an example of one of Thoreau's reinforced clichés and of one of his plays on words. The reader might assume that "House-Warming," particularly in the context of such chapters as "Visitors" and "Brute Neighbors," concerns the welcoming of visitors to a home; in this case, of Thoreau's visitors to his cabin. However, he applies the expression far more literally to the chapter, which actually concerns Thoreau's mode of life in the winter at Walden Pond; in particular his methods of insulating his cabin. His general rejuvenation of clichés demonstrates his use of style to emulate meaning. "House-warming," the reader assumes, relates to a social pastime. Thoreau illustrates that the term actually refers to a necessary practical activity – literally warming the house.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

"Former Inhabitants and Winter Visitors" is a chapter principally concerned with the former; with the people that Thoreau identifies as inhabitants of the area around Walden Pond before his arrival there. The significance of the chapter in *Walden*, as a complete work, is its demonstration of the mortality of men, and the minutia of any man's destiny on nature's canvas.

Thoreau presents an impression of each one of the characters the former inhabitants of the area. There are four: Zilpha, "a colored woman"; Brister Freeman, "a handy Negro"; Breed; and Wyman, "the potter." He also alludes to those who visited him at his cabin: Ellery Channing, Amos Bronson Alcott, and – probably – Ralph Waldo Emerson.

When Thoreau alludes to his visitors, the poets Channing and Emerson; and the controversial Concord Transcendentalist, Alcott, he does so in the context of another very evocative account of his experience of the winter, and apparently to give a general account of his life in the winter at Walden Pond.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Thoreau creates descriptions of those who had lived in the area previously to emphasize the durability of nature. He focuses upon the idiosyncrasies of the former inhabitants to give only a partial impression of them. He also incorporates secondhand information about the characters to emphasize the chronological distance between them and Thoreau. Zilpha, for example, is said to have lived in her little house and spun linen for the people in town. She was known for her loud singing. In the war of 1812, Thoreau relates that her home burnt down, along with her cat, her dogs, her hens and her possessions. The effect of this narrative technique is simple. It presents her as a character distinct from the narrator.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The principal subject of the fifteenth chapter is very apparent in the chapter's title. In "Winter Animals," Thoreau does indeed describe the behavior of various winter animals in their habitats as he observed them. The portraits ultimately suggest that there was a connection between Thoreau and these animals that inhabited the area surrounding Walden Pond.

Thoreau introduces the subject of the animals by referring to the sounds he heard at night, which included the sound of an owl hooting. Interestingly, Thoreau introduces the concept of the common language of Walden by giving the Latin term, "lingua vernacular," which means common language. The effect of quoting the term in Latin is clear: the quotation thus emulates the meaning; in the context that Thoreau applies it at least.

The next animal that Thoreau mentions is the fox. The fox, Thoreau writes, "Ranged over the snow crust, in the moonlight nights, in search of a partridge or other game." The image is highly evocative and artistic, made almost Gothic by Thoreau's elaboration, in which he describes the foxes as barking "raggedly" and "demoniacally" in the night. Thoreau also alludes to the red squirrels that woke him in the morning, to the rabbits, which came often and ate a lot at night; the harsh screams of jays; the and to the habits of the chickadees and partridges.

Chapter 15 Analysis

By mentioning the various animals and their behaviors that he has observed, Thoreau suggests the degree of interaction between humans and animals – the benefits of cohabitation. He compliments this suggestion throughout the fifteenth chapter by beginning to discuss the behavior of hunters; Thoreau then describes the hunt of the fox in detail, the final result being, "the fox rolling over the rock" and lying "dead on the ground" The image demonstrates the fragility of nature and the potential damage that mankind is capable of inflicting. There is a parallel between the destruction of the hunt and the suggestion of preservation that Thoreau has created by describing his interaction with the animals. It is paradoxical that life and death, the creative force of nature and the destructive force of man, exist together.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Thoreau explores the process of scientific investigation in "The Pond in Winter." He begins with suggestions that the natural world is something of an enigma. Thoreau then seemingly condemns men that come to fish by writing of them: "they never consulted with books, and know and can tell much less than they have done." He continues to compare the fish to valuable and rare items, reiterating a theme of *Walden*: a suggestion that the foreign and distant are, quite falsely, perceived as a more valuable quality than the familiar and local.

He states the purpose of his exploration, saying he wanted to find the bottom of Walden Pond, which, by some, had long been considered bottomless. He then ridicules the popular perception that the pond was bottomless, saying stories had been around for a long time about its bottomlessness – stories with no foundation. He also seemingly condemns men for believing without trying out their theories. Thoreau then describes the process whereby he was able to calculate the depth of the pond, allowing him to conclude that at its deepest it was 102 feet. However, the general discourse on scientific investigation continues.

He concludes that, "if we knew all the laws of Nature, we should need only one fact, or the description of one actual phenomenon, to infer all the particular results." This statement reiterates the theories of scientists, physicists in particular, who strive to discover a single theory to explain the universe; however, Thoreau's statement is to support his next hypothesis that what he has observed at the pond is also true in ethics. He provides several examples to demonstrate the truth of this.

The subject shifts again, following Thoreau's reference to the seasonal changes of cold in January. The discourse concerns Thoreau's observations of local men ice fishing and collecting ice from the pond. The final paragraph of the chapter, as is typical of Thoreau in *Walden*, incorporates classical illusions and references to Hindu philosophy and religious practices.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Symbolically, there is a shift from a theoretical style, characterized by Thoreau's use of general nouns and pronouns such as "men" and "they," to a more personal and practical style, in which Thoreau returns to describing his experiences of applying scientific method. He begins once again to portray Walden Pond as a beautiful natural feature. Thoreau uses exclamation to imitate his meaning in style: "Ah, the pickerel of Walden!"

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The second to last chapter of *Walden* marks the end of the year cycle that Thoreau incorporates into the text. "Spring," following a series of chapters that have contained many references and illusions to winter, opens with a description of thawing ice and snow.

The opening of Walden Pond, Thoreau mentions, was usually around the beginning of April. The thawing of the ice and snow becomes important to the central theme regarding scales and proportions, "the phenomena of the year take place every day in a pond on as small scale," which supports Thoreau's suggestion in the previous chapter that the foreign, the unfamiliar, or the distant is, in fact, no less remarkable and valuable than the familiar and local. Thoreau offers one particular reason that he moved to Walden Pond, which was to have the time and opportunity to witness the spring come in. He describes the gradual wearing away of the ice that covered the pond by the warming sun. He feels that nature must by observed and studied in practice rather than regarded in principle and in theory alone.

"The year begins with younger hope that ever!" he exclaims; illustrating that the theme of the yearly cycle is in tune with a cycle of activity: winter is the time of hibernation, whereas spring is of rejuvenation, summer of growth, and autumn a time of cessation and death. Abruptly ending the poetic style and content of this section, Thoreau succinctly records the date on which he finally left Walden Pond as September 6th 1847.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Thoreau presents the coming of spring as the dawning of a Golden Age. The classical illusions create this impression in a rounded manner. The references are to Ovid's "Metamorphoses" and to the works of the Chinese philosopher, Meng-tzu, known as Mencius. The adverb, "apace," compliments Thoreau's use of the present tense, incorporating the present participle, "melting." The sentence becomes the more dramatic because of the combined grammatical and linguistic elements.

The glory of nature is demonstrative on another level: that of Thoreau's personal experience of it, as he concludes the chapter with statements such as that "we can never have enough of Nature," and, "we must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features." Evidence of Thoreau's transcendental sympathies is seen in his expression that, "we need to witness our own limits transgressed," meaning that we need, presumably, to observe things that are beyond our understanding and other capacities.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Concluding *Walden*, Thoreau is perhaps especially figurative in his language; and grandiose in his illusions, particularly to explorers and discoverers, including Sir John Franklin, who disappeared in 1847 while searching for the Northwest Passage. Thoreau is advocating that men try to be like such men; in principle, not in their actions, because he suggests that men ought to explore worlds of thought within themselves instead of physical worlds and trade routes. He suggests that exploration of continents and the like is a meaningless distraction for men. Thoreau argues self-exploration is more valuable and meaningful than the physical, more so than the general learning. Hence, "if you would learn to speak all tongues and conform to the customs of all nations, if you would travel further than all travelers…Explore thyself."

Within the discourse on why Thoreau went to live beside Walden Pond is his justification for leaving: "I had several more lives to live." He suggests that he discovered this by the practice of self-exploration that he has recommended. Thoreau's use of this word, "experiment" throughout *Walden* has emphasized that his time in the woods was to be of short duration; so his advice, the reader may understand, is applicable to their lives in the world as much as to Thoreau's life in the woods. The conclusion that Thoreau draws, however, is that the universe will seem much less complex in direct proportion to the amount one simplifies his or her own life.

Walden ends with an intriguing paragraph, phrased like a resignation from the complexities of the world: "I do not say that John or Jonathan will realize all this but such is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star."

Chapter 18 Analysis

John and Jonathan were considered common names for English and American men, respectively; Thoreau suggests, therefore, that he is resigned that common men, or the majority of men, may not understand his advice or appreciate his discoveries, but there are enough changes and awakenings in the natural world that there may be similar occurrences in the world of men. The references to "dawn" and to the sun echo the themes of reawakening at springtime; and, particularly in the context of the chapter, of resurrection.

The way in which Thoreau presents his departure from the woods represents a return to life, as if his life in the woods was somehow the equivalent of death. Yet it simultaneously signifies rebirth, as he embarked upon a new life at Walden.

Walden endures as a classic of nineteenth century literature, with its trademark narrative style, incorporating an array of rich metaphors and references. One need only compare it to the work of George Eliot and Henry James; or that of Thoreau's contemporaries, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. The most enduring quality of Walden, however, is its presentation of nature. As Henry James says: "Whatever question there may be of Thoreau's talent, there can be none, I think, of his genius … at his best he has an extremely natural charm … Thoreau lived for Concord every effectively, and by his remarkable genius for observation of the phenomena of woods and streams, of plants and trees, and beasts and fishes" from Hawthorne (1879).

Characters

The Canadian Woodchopper

The woodchopper does his work in Walden Woods, and he and Thoreau often visit. He is a big, strong, good-natured man who works hard and is content with his life although he makes little money. He knows how to read and enjoys reading the works of Homer even though he doesn't understand them. After getting to know the woodchopper, Thoreau concludes, "The intellectual and what is called spiritual man in him were slumbering as in an infant."

James Collins

James Collins is an Irishman who works for the railroad and lives in a shanty near where Thoreau builds his cabin. Thoreau buys Collins's shanty for $4.25 and disassembles it to use the boards and nails in his cabin. On the morning of the transfer of ownership, Thoreau sees Collins and his family on the road, with all their possessions wrapped up in one large bundle.

John Field

John Field is an Irishman who lives with his wife and children in a hut near the Baker Farm. During a rainstorm Thoreau goes to take shelter in the hut, which he thinks is vacant, but finds Field and his family there. Thoreau can see that John works very hard as a "bogger" (someone who turns the soil for farmers) to support his family and yet lives very poorly. Thoreau explains his own way of life, hoping that John will adopt it and thus live better while working less. He tells John if he would give up luxuries such as coffee and butter, he could give up his toil. He wouldn't need to buy boots if he quit his job, Thoreau says, and he could easily catch fish in the pond and sell them for the little money he would need. John and his wife seem to consider this briefly but, according to Thoreau, they are unable to understand how they could live as Thoreau suggests. "It was sailing by dead reckoning to them, and they saw not clearly how to make their port," he writes.

Brister Freeman

Brister Freeman was a former slave who lived on Brister's Hill before Thoreau's stay in the woods. He was an apple-grower. He is a character in the book because during the winter, when there are few visitors, Thoreau thinks about the woods' former residents to occupy his mind. In effect, his past neighbors become present company. Thoreau reports that he has read Brister's epitaph in the cemetery.

Fenda Freeman

The wife of Brister Freeman, Fenda was a fortune teller.

The Hermit

The Hermit is one of two fictional characters in the book and clearly represents Thoreau. The Hermit has a dramatic dialogue with The Poet, in which The Poet comes to visit The Hermit and tempts him to leave his solitary meditations and go fishing. The Hermit succumbs to this temptation and goes fishing with The Poet, temporarily allowing his desire for worldly and sensual pleasures to overcome his desire for spiritual experience.

Cato Ingraham

Cato was another former slave who lived in Walden Woods before Thoreau. His former master had provided him with land to live on and a house. Cato planted walnut trees on his land so that he would have an asset in his old age, but Thoreau reports that a white man somehow took Cato's walnuts from him.

The Poet

The Poet is one of two fictional characters in the book and represents a visitor from the village. The Poet has a dramatic dialogue with The Hermit, in which The Poet tempts The Hermit to leave his solitary meditations and go fishing.

Hugh Quoil

Hugh Quoil was another past resident of the woods who had lived in the place once occupied by Wyman the potter. It was rumored that Quoil had fought at Waterloo. He had a certain sophistication but was an alcoholic. Thoreau says that " All I know of him was tragic" and describes what he saw when he visited Quoil's cabin after his death: "His pipe lay broken on the hearth. . . . The skin of a woodchuck was freshly stretched upon the back of the house, a trophy of his last Waterloo; but no warm cap or mittens would he want more."

Henry David Thoreau

Thoreau is the book's narrator. An eccentric philosopher and lover of nature, Thoreau builds a cabin near Walden Pond, intending to live in solitude as an experiment in simplicity and spiritual exploration. "My greatest skill has been to want but little," Thoreau writes. He grows food, both for his own needs and to sell for the little money he requires. He reads and entertains occasional visitors. He spends many hours walking in

the woods around his cabin, closely observing the landscape and animals. In this communion with nature, he also finds communion with the divine.

Thoreau is both irritable and humorous, often simultaneously, and he is a man of contradictions. He compares human beings to muskrats and vermin, and the only thing he likes less than people is people organized in the form of institutions. "Wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society," he complains. Yet he admits that he walks into the village often to hear news and gossip, and when deep winter keeps all visitors away, he conjures up memories and stories of past residents of the woods to keep him company.

Wyman

Another former resident of the woods whom Thoreau recalls, Wyman was a potter who sold his wares in the village. Thoreau reports that Wyman and his descendants were so poor that the tax collector would come around and find nothing of value to take except a pot or two. Wyman, like Thoreau, lived on the land as a squatter.

Zilpha

Zilpha was a former slave who lived in Walden Woods before Thoreau stayed there. Zilpha earned her meager living by spinning cloth, singing as she spun. During the War of 1812, English soldiers burned her small home and all her animals. "She led a hard life, and somewhat inhumane," Thoreau writes.

Themes

Unity

According to Thoreau's transcendentalist philosophy, nature, humanity, and God are unified. His transcendent God is also immanent□present in every raindrop, blade of grass, and animal as well as in every human being. Further, one of the best ways for human beings to experience their own unity with God is to observe nature. In the woods one day, he writes:

I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me.

Explaining why he loves the company of nature, Thoreau writes, "Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?" This theme of unity occurs throughout the book, often through metaphors, similes, and personifications that equate nature, humans and the divine. "I may be either the driftwood in the stream or Indra [a Hindu deity] in the sky looking down on it," he declares. Watching hawks circle above him, he sees them as "the embodiment of my own thoughts." Hearing bullfrogs, he thinks of them as "the sturdy spirits of ancient wine-bibbers and wassailers, still unrepentant, trying to sing a catch in their Stygian lake." (In Greek myth, the River Styx is in Hades; the souls of the dead are rowed across it.) When whippoorwills sing, he writes that they "chanted their vespers," attributing to them a knowledge of and reverence for God.

The goal of the transcendentalist is to experience God within. Thoreau exulted that living immersed in nature at Walden Pond allowed him to attain this goal often.

Solitude

For Thoreau, living outside of human community is the complement to living immersed in nature. One must withdraw from human company to truly experience oneness with nature and, therefore, with God. "I love to be alone," he declares.

Thoreau sometimes had visitors at his cabin and sometimes walked into the village to hear news and observe people (much as he observed animals; in one passage he compares watching people in the village to watching muskrats in the woods). But, he writes, "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating."

Human society moves too fast for Thoreau and centers around things that are of no interest to him: acquiring large homes and luxuries, giving fancy dinner parties, gossiping, and working long hours to pay for things. He sees most people as being spiritually asleep, and feels he has nothing in common with them.

In answer to those who asked if he was lonely, Thoreau writes that he had much company in his solitude. "Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me," he assures readers. He even asserts that he was visited by God "in the long winter evenings" and by Mother Nature□"a ruddy and lustful old dame" who told him fables and invited him to walk in her garden.

Individualism

The idea of individualism is closely related to Thoreau's transcendentalism. According to this philosophy, human beings need no priests, scriptures, or traditions to know God, because God resides in each individual and can be found by being true to oneself.

Thoreau's own strong sense of individualism shows throughout the book, as he rejects virtually all the conventions of his time and place to find his own way of living. His ascetic, nearly vegetarian diet of cheap, local foods was as uncommon as his choice to go off and live rustically in the woods.

Encouraging individualism, Thoreau writes what has become one of the most enduring ideas in all his work: "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."

Style

First-Person Narration

Thoreau wrote *Walden* in the first person. He explains on the first page that, although "I" is omitted from most books, "it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking." In addition, he explains that the book is all about Thoreau himself. "I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well," he assures readers.

Because of its first-person narration, and because it is based on journals, readers often assume that *Walden* was written "off the cuff" or that its organization is informal or accidental. Nothing could be further from the truth. Thoreau spent seven years after his stay at Walden rewriting and revising his manuscript. He structured the book to suit his dual purposes of explaining how he lived and of urging readers to apply his experiences to their own lives. He compressed twenty-six months into one year for his narrative, beginning and ending in spring, the season of rebirth. Within the general structure of a one-year span, Thoreau organized his material by topic, rather than strictly chronologically. For example, the chapter "The Village" comes during the "summer" season of the book, but not every incident related in it actually took place during summer.

Description

Walden is rich in densely detailed descriptive passages that make use of so much figurative language and imagery that they are poetic. Thoreau's descriptions of the landscape and the wildlife around him are a testament to his close observations of nature. He uses lively, precise words and unusual phrases to convey the sights and sounds of nature. To cite one example of many, he writes that on a summer afternoon the

. . . hawks are circling about my clearing; the tantivy of wild pigeons, flying by twos and threes athwart my view, or perching restless on the white pine boughs behind my house, gives a voice to the air; a fish hawk dimples the glassy surface of the pond and brings up a fish; a mink steals out of the marsh before my door and seizes a frog by the shore; the sedge is bending under the weight of the reed-birds flitting hither and thither; and for the last half-hour I have heard the rattle of railroad cars, now dying away and then reviving like the beat of a partridge.

References to Persons and Literature

Evidence that Thoreau has read the world's great books, as he urges his readers to do, is liberally sprinkled throughout *Walden.* He demonstrates familiarity with the Bible and with the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita of Hinduism; with the Greek and Roman gods

and goddesses; with Homer and Aeschylus in the Western canon and with poets of the Middle East; and with the rulers, explorers, and scientists of his own time and of the past.

These wide-ranging references reinforce the theme of unity. Thoreau shows that the scriptures and the great men of different cultures and different times have much in common and can be cited in support of the same ideas.

Humor

The author's seriousness of purpose and his sense of urgency in conveying his ideas do not smother Thoreau's sense of humor, which makes frequent appearances in Walden. Criticizing the impracticality of formal education, Thoreau writes, "To my astonishment I was informed on leaving college that I had studied navigation!" and declares that he would have learned more by sailing once around the harbor. On his opinion that people keep their homes overheated in winter and wear too many clothes, he writes:

By proper Shelter and Clothing we legitimately retain our own internal heat; but with an excess of these, or of Fuel, that is, with an external heat greater than our own internal, may not cookery be said to begin?

Historical Context

New England Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism took root in New England in the mid-1830s in reaction against the rationalism (emphasis on intellectual understanding) of the Unitarian Church. The philosophy centered on the premise that divine truth is present in all things and that truth, or God, is known through intuition, not through the rational mind. From this core proceeded the belief that all of nature, including all humans, is one with God.

The term "transcendental" was borrowed from German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who wrote in his well-known work *Critique of Practical Reason,* "I call all knowledge transcendental which is concerned, not with objects, but with our mode of knowing objects so far as this is possible a priori" (meaning, independent of sensory experience). American transcendentalism was thus clearly linked to similar philosophies that existed in Europe, and it also shared important ideas with Eastern philosophies and religions, including Hinduism. The New England transcendentalists read the Bhagavad Gita (which Thoreau reports that he read in the mornings) and the Vedas (which Thoreau references several times), among other Eastern scriptures.

The New England transcendentalists did not confine themselves to literary pursuits but also tried to put their philosophy into practice. Some, such as Bronson Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody, focused on educational reform. Peabody and Margaret Fuller applied the principles of transcendentalism to the crusade for women's rights. The group created two experimental communities, Fruitlands and Brook Farm.

It is the writing of Thoreau and of Emerson that has been the most enduring product of American transcendentalism. Thoreau's ideas about nonviolent resistance to oppression were very important both to Mahatma Gandhi's campaign against the British in India in the early 1900s, and to the American civil rights movement of the 1960s.

The Building of the Railroads

Critical Overview

Walden was widely reviewed when it first appeared. This attention was due not to Thoreau's reputation (he had only one other published book, and it had not sold well) but to his publisher's energetic promotion of the book and to the support of Thoreau's well-known friend Emerson. Many publications printed excerpts of *Walden* to herald its arrival.

Most reviews were positive. "It is a strikingly original, singular, and most interesting work," wrote a reviewer in the *Salem Register.* The *Lowell Journal and Courier* noted, "The press all over the country have given the most flattering notices of it" and predicted, "without doubt it will command a very extensive sale. It surely deserves it."

Deserving or not, the book did not sell well. About seven hundred fifty copies were sold in the first year after publication. And not all notices were positive. A reviewer for the *Boston Daily Journal* wrote,

Mr. Thoreau has made an attractive book. . . . But while many will be fascinated by its contents, few will be improved. As the pantheistic doctrines of the author marred the beauty of his former work, so does his selfish philosophy darkly tinge the pages of Walden.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5

Critical Essay #1

Norvell is an independent educational writer who specializes in English and literature. She holds degrees in linguistics and journalism and has done graduate work in theology. In this essay, she discusses Thoreau's frequent references to Christianity and Hinduism throughout Walden.

Walden is a book of contrasts. Thoreau contrasts summer and winter, village and woods, the animal and spiritual natures that struggle within every human being, and many other pairs of opposites. One recurring and important contrast is that between Christianity—especially as taught and practiced in America at the time Thoreau was writing—and Hinduism. Like other New England transcendentalists, Thoreau was an avid reader of Hindu scriptures, and he quotes them and refers to them often in *Walden.* Like virtually all Americans of his time, he was also familiar with the Bible and with how the Christian denominations of his day interpreted it. What is particularly interesting is how he uses this dual knowledge. Most references to Christian scriptures, doctrines, and practices are either irreverent or disapproving, while Hindu scriptures and beliefs are presented with reverent appreciation.

Neither Thoreau's disdain for contemporary Christianity nor his appreciation of Hinduism is surprising. The popularity of transcendentalist ideas in New England arose out of discontent with what some saw as the strict and uninspiring doctrines of the Unitarian Church, so there was a natural conflict between transcendentalists and organized Christianity. Further, a fundamental difference between transcendentalism and Christianity can be traced to Hinduism: While orthodox Christian doctrine holds that God is transcendent (existing beyond creation) but not immanent (existing within creation; i.e., present within all created things and beings, including humans), transcendentalism borrows the Hindu concept that God is both transcendent and immanent.

The difference is important. The Christian belief that God does not dwell in humans leads to the belief in the need for some kind of divinely appointed intermediary—such as a savior or a priest—to establish a relationship between people and God. In contrast, the Hindu and transcendentalist belief in the immanence of God leads to the doctrine that every person can, without the need for an intermediary, experience the divine within himself or herself.

The transcendentalist belief in every person's ability to know God outside of institutional religion is a perfect complement to Thoreau's individualism and his general dislike of institutions. He found in the scriptures and doctrines of Hinduism a religious teaching that was well suited to his personality and his philosophy of life. Everything about the Christianity of his time, with its emphasis on institutions, conformity, and obedience to church authorities, was in conflict with them.

Thus, Thoreau makes more than one mocking reference to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the "manual" of Christian doctrine that was used to teach young people in many churches. According to the catechism, the primary purpose of human life is "to

glorify God and enjoy him forever." In one reference to it, Thoreau writes, "Our hymn books resound with a melodious cursing of God and enduring him forever."

Thoreau denigrates a Methodist newspaper of his day, called *Olive-Branches.* He writes that people who want to read a newspaper should read the best one available rather than *Olive-Branches* or other "pap."

The comment that "Men are generally still a little afraid of the dark, though the witches are all hung, and Christianity and candles have been introduced" manages all at once to be jocular and disapproving (it was, of course, in the name of Christianity that the witches had been hung) and dismissive (neither Christianity itself nor its assaults on others had succeeded in freeing humanity from its age-old fears).

In a later passage, Thoreau takes aim at the exclusivism of the Christianity practiced in is society. He says that the local farm hand "who has had his second birth and peculiar religious experience" may think that such experiences are limited to people who believe just as he does, but "Zoroaster, thousands of years ago, traveled the same road and had the same experience; but he, being wise, knew it to be universal and treated his neighbors accordingly." Thoreau goes on to point out that Zoroaster, as the founder of Zoroastrianism, the oldest of the world's great religions,may be said to have "invented and established worship among men." His point is that human beings sincerely worshipped God thousands of years before the founding of the Christian church. Thoreau concludes the passage by suggesting that Christians should "humbly commune with Zoroaster . . . and . . . with Jesus Christ himself, and let 'our church' go by the board."

(While he doesn't mention it, Thoreau must have been aware, from his study of the Hindu scriptures, that even the term "second birth" or "born again" is not exclusive or original to Christianity. Hinduism uses the very same term, with some similarity in meaning.)

In the above passage and in others, Thoreau makes a distinction between the founder of Christianity and institutionalized Christianity. In the passage above, he makes clear that he values the teachings of Jesus Christ but not those of "our church." In "Reading," a chapter in which he urges readers to read the great books, he gives the Bible a place alongside his beloved Vedas (Hindu scriptures), writing:

That age will be rich indeed when those relics which we call Classics, and the still older and more than classic but even less known Scriptures of the nations,shall have still further accumulated; when the Vaticans shall be filled with Vedas and Zendavestas [the scriptures of Zoroastrianism] and Bibles. . . . By such a pile we may hope to scale heaven at last.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Fanuzzi explores how Thoreau "describes not just an imagined city but how cities became imaginary" in Walden.

A second look at *Walden* suggests that Thoreau went to the country to find the city. He admits that his seclusion is motivated by necessity, since the opportunities for "beautiful living" once characteristic of civilized society are now found only "out of doors, where there is no house and no housekeeper." Thus secluded, he finds "a good port" from which to conduct his "private business," a railroad line to link a "citizen of the world" to national and international marketplaces, a cosmopolitan alternative to Concord's unlettered, "provincial" culture, and even□through Ellery Channing's companionship□the bonhomie of Broadway. Perhaps most important, he determines that by cultivating Catonian civic virtue, he has reacquired the integrity to "sustain . . . the manliest relations to men" forfeited by his neighboring yeomen. In sum, every historic association of the city was present at Walden Pond□except, of course, the city itself.

The city is indeed both present and absent in *Walden.* It exists through references and allusions to city life, which is to say it exists as metonymy. This city has no geographical equivalent and in fact disclaims its status as locality, for Thoreau's intent is to use historically identified conventions of urbanism to conceive a space that corresponds to his imagination. Still retaining his sense of place, he wants this space to be habitable. When he asks in the midst of the woods, "What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary?," his metaphor adumbrates a sphere of autonomy bounded only by the means of its articulation. Throughout *Walden,* he deliberately designates those activities proper to this sphere□thinking, walking, writing, reading, thinking□and circumscribes them as art, which he defines as the "struggle to free himself from this low state." Like other contemporary utopian reforms, his artistic realization contains the promise of a living space in which one may find the virtue, prosperity, and liberty not found in other environs. With a "mission" that Benjamin terms "the emancipation from experiences," Thoreau strolls through the woods as the flaneur: an aesthetic consciousness whose individualized perception and mode of expression constitute his experience of place.

If Thoreau had lived in Boston, it would be easier to endow him with an urban imagination, though as my opening paragraph suggests, it is surely possible to contrast his project with pastoralism. The greater challenge that *Walden* poses is to see the imagination that Thoreau exercised so freely not only as spatial logic but as a construction of social space and, even more particularly, as a historical incidence of urbanism. In *Walden,* Thoreau creates what urbanists call a development history for the imagination, accounting for the creation of avowedly figural forms by the same changes in social morphology that were transforming the built and unbuilt landscape of eastern Massachusetts into centers or subsidiaries of an equally new social form, the urban-industrial complex. He attributes the liberation of the imagination directly to urbanization, but the same process provided the negative conditions for artistic production. Indeed,

describing the emergence of the imagination as a spatialized form for Thoreau meant projecting an invisible space existing only as traces or inferences of representation. In Walden, this prospect is realized as an imagined city symbolizing a civic tradition with its attendant social spaces that was disappearing from Concord's increasingly urbanized environs. Though Thoreau stood by this tradition and detested its compromise, he did not resist the processes of historical and morphological change. On the contrary, he exploited them, transforming mutable civic space into its timeless utopian representation. Thoreau's civic project was, in fact, to intensify the awareness of artistic representation□a prospect which Paul Ricoeur defines as the operation of the utopian□in order to mark a disjunction in the progress of liberalism between the material development of cities and its invisible moral and political abstractions. Because Thoreau situated himself in the midst of this conflict, Walden describes not just an imagined city but how cities became imaginary. We can consider this event to be as crucial to the emergence of Thoreau's artistic consciousness as to the future of urban space, keeping in mind Benjamin's judgment of Baudelaire: "He envisioned blank spaces which he filled in with his poems. His work cannot merely be categorized as historical like anyone else's, but it intended to be so and understood itself as so. . . . "

Thoreau's aspiration towards idiosyncrasy not withstanding,the unique history that Walden tells is the emergence of aesthetic forms from the conventions and traditions of civic life. Indeed, his determination to recreate this life in the midst of the woods lays bare the enabling assumption of an artistic sensibility: that a city is a construct of consciousness, imagined through the awareness of individuality, if not alienation, that city life engenders. While urbanism thus defined is central to our conception of modernism, the tendency to interpret urban space as the medium of the imagination is already extant in the place names for many of the locales of nineteenth-century literature: in addition to Baudelaire's Paris, Whitman's New York, Crane's Bowery, Dickens's London, and so on. The distinctiveness of Thoreau's Walden Pond among these "unreal cities" is that it brings to the fore the contradiction between the experience of place and the actual place, so that both the imaginative processes and the means of representation are defamiliarized. That is, they are foregrounded and thematized as locales in themselves. For Thoreau, this defamiliarization promises an unprecedented and unbounded sphere of experience, but he will also insist that this "sort of space" shares the structure, conditions, and even the history of a spatialized social form.

We are introduced to this contradiction early in *Walden,* when Thoreau quite deliberately juxtaposes associations of city and country. After berating his townsmen for their industriousness, he announces that his "purpose in going to Walden Pond was . . . to transact some private business." Then he invites a comparison between his solitary life of rustic simplicity and the far-flung, multitudinous affairs of the international mercantile trader. In assuming this identity, Thoreau is also borrowing its native habitat. According to political historian Gary Nash, the international merchant would have been a politically active Whig or Federalist, committed to liberalizing developments in government and trade and usually situated in an Atlantic port city like Boston, Baltimore, New York, or Philadelphia. Thoreau contends that Walden Pond is likewise "a good place for business" because of its "good port and good foundation," as well as its ice-trade-convenient railroad connection. In "Sounds," he will say that the railroad, transporting

exotic goods from free and distant markets, makes him akin to the international merchant, a "citizen of the world." He evidently wants to build not just a city on a hill but a commercial society by a pond, "the germ," he says, "of something more."

In borrowing an urban locale, Thoreau is also reclaiming a political history. Through their alliance with restive manufacturers and disenfranchised artisans, the liberal Whig traders of the eighteenth century made the Atlantic commercial city into the center of political resistance against monopolies, mercantilism, and colonialism. By comparing himself to the urban merchant, Thoreau perpetuates a complementary vision of freedom: the autonomy promised the urban commercial classes in a postcolonial, laissez-faire economy. We may read his intention "to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles" as a similar link between political and economic freedom. This linking would have been compatible with his reigning ambition in *Walden* and in many of his essays, which was to establish the relevance of the nation's democratic revolution to antebellum America; but here he seeks to recreate the appropriate social space for continued struggle through detailed historical references to the eighteenth-century commercial city. In the spirit of the urban Whigs Trenchard and Gordon, Thoreau envisions this space as a free society of trade and commerce, politically and geographically beyond the reach of an intrusive state. The taxation that he seemed to oppose so capriciously represented what these liberals feared most: the intervention of statist policies—whether they financed trade monopolies, the slave trade, or a system of railroads—in the properly private affairs of civil society.

For Thoreau, this kind of uncivil, neomercantilist economy signifies a structural change in the polity, a reorganization of social space that gives the state its own space, the all-inclusive yet personalized space of the *nation.* He detects the expansion of this space in the sentiments of citizens who "think it essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour," but he will protect an ideal of civil autonomy rooted in eighteenth-century urban liberalism. When he says that such citizens are "content to live like baboons," he applies a venerable term of moral opprobrium—corruption—to Jefferson's laboring yeomen.

Thoreau's praise of the cosmopolitan merchant, on the other hand, is unstinting; he affects envy, almost wonder, for what amounts to "a demand for universal knowledge." But he is determined to let neither the location of Walden Pond nor the passage of time deprive him of the intelligence, freedom, and prosperity available to the eighteenth-century urban bourgeoisie. He builds his identification with this class by undermining both the pastoral tradition of American letters and the nationalist history it projected. Whereas Bryant and even Emerson celebrated nature as the extension and progress of positive sovereignty, Thoreau represents nature according to the self-negating provisions of civil society. That is, he considers Walden Pond to be natural insofar as it is a completely privative realm, free of superfluous obstacles and unconditioned by an intrusive alien power. Thoreau calls life in this realm "primitive and frontier life" not because it is wild but precisely because it is governed by "the essential laws of man's existence," which he finds recorded in "the old day books of the merchants." Not surprisingly, these laws instruct Thoreau in the ways of bourgeois society: what is natural and necessary is "all that man obtains by his own exertions." Under this

condition, he disqualifies the labor of his neighboring farmers, who work not for themselves but for the holders of their mortgages on their homes and farms. So he is forced to commend the unencumbered wigwam, the virtues of uncultivated fields, and the political economy of squirrels. His deprecation of baboons notwithstanding, animals furnish Thoreau with perhaps his most explicitly self-justifying image of the bourgeoisie: their orderly yet consummately free lives follow only the dictates of natural, invisible laws. He makes special allowances when he adds Fuel and Clothing to the animals' necessities of Food and Shelter, but he considers any life that obeys intrinsic imperatives to be both a moral and material improvement over that of Concord townsmen.

Walden ultimately recommends that the conscientious citizen devote himself to "more sacred laws," but Thoreau's attachment to a legally constituted dominion in heaven or on earth perpetuates a historically urban form of society in the absence of a corresponding urban space. Thoreau was well aware of the historical discrepancy, but he means the invocation of an antecedent social form to annul the influence of the state by providing a permanent haven from positive law. In this sense, he is using the pastoral to revive, replay, and infinitely extend eighteenth-century urbanization, which created not only the infrastructure of public dissent but an invisible realm called civil society, which, as Habermas says, was governed by "anonymous laws functioning in accord with an economic rationality immanent, so it appears, in the market." Though Habermas does not historicize the urban development that created this realm, he does make the rise of a "town" consciousness, in opposition to that of a "court," coincident with the codification of civil laws that have exclusive administrative jurisdiction over economic and social exchanges. Thoreau places himself under these "more liberal laws" and hopes that they can again convene an autonomous society in the midst of the woods. In commending Walden Pond for its "good port," he is making a glancing reference to the shared history of liberal capitalism and urban development, though he maintains that the commercial city rising from Walden Pond would be built "on piles of your own driving."

Thoreau repeatedly argues a classically liberal ideal of individual autonomy, but he does not abstract even the discussion of inward nature from the infrastructure and institutions of an urbanized social form. His conception of a morally guided subject, obedient to "the laws of his own being," is derived from the self-governing commercial society, while his concern for the state of "true integrity" links him more particularly to the Whig-Federalist city's civic sphere, which fused the republican politics of disinterested virtue with an economically constituted social space. From the Revolution to the antebellum era, the commercial city was indeed the sphere in which the new nation's republican pretensions were given institutional form, often most effectively translated by the Whig-Federalist commercial classes. The lyceums, atheneums, libraries, and salons that composed the antebellum era's "republican institutions" were first developed in Atlantic port cities; with no attempt to disguise the city's principal indigenous activity, their wealthy patrons celebrated them as "cultural ornaments to mercantile society." In conjunction with Federalist architecture's French neo-classicism, these "cultural ornaments" fueled the post-Revolutionary city's comparison of itself to the classical polis, although this was more true for Philadelphia and Boston than for single-mindedly mercantile New York;

the former two competed with one another for the title "Athens of America." Within the institutions of this civic sphere, self-seeking burghers could transcend their interests and exercise their rational faculties. Perhaps even more importantly, an unruly populace would learn how to govern itself by the laws of reason.

The Jacksonian era may have envisioned a form of society in the image of the rural majority, but in *Walden* the Whig-Federalist city plan is recovered and extended. In "Reading," Thoreau proposes that Concord proper be developed along the lines of a classically Federalist city, replete with indigenous salons, galleries, libraries, lyceums, and other educational facilities. He exhorts the citizens of Concord not to adopt a "provincial" life but to "act collectively in the spirit of our [prospective] institutions" and "take the place of the noblemen in Europe." This ambition to create "noble villages of men" is in keeping with a principal objective of the early republic, which was to authorize its sovereignty through the education of a rational public capable of governing itself. But in practical terms, this imperative is also an impetus for city-building, for the republican project of political education entailed the development of a cosmopolitan center capable of receiving information, influences, and goods, as Thoreau insists, from distant ports. "Reading" resituates republicanism in an urban tradition and suggests that the Transcendentalists' project of self-culture derives from its plans for civic development.

Jefferson's abhorrence of cities has led us to equate republicanism with the country, but politics and geography are often difficult to equate, especially during the early national period in New England. If agrarianism was celebrated as a republican ideal, it was promoted by the same Federalist urban merchants who were building and promoting the port city. In Boston, a group known as the Essex Junto was particularly effective in investing rural life with the same power to inculcate virtue that the urban institutions aimed at. The country seats and adjoining farms that dotted the eastern Massachusetts landscape were considered not as alternative economies in their own right but as necessary adjuncts to market exchanges that guaranteed the exchanges' virtue and their contribution to the public good. Agrarianism served urban commercial interests even more explicitly when it was accompanied by a program of political education. In lectures such as "The Duty of the Farmer to His Calling" and "Why a Massachusetts Farmer Should Be Content," farmers were told by an urban elite that they were the pillars of the republic and that their thrift, frugality, and increasingly unprofitable industry furnished the moral basis of a predominantly commercial society.

Thoreau may have sought respite from modern society in natural environs, but his plans for Walden Woods and vicinity reflect the traditional land-use patterns of the urban Federalist. In "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for," he reports that he roamed the countryside as a self-appointed real-estate broker, financier, and landscape architect of imaginary country seats; he then reinterprets this conventional pattern of subdivision as the simple experience of sitting. To further link his *"sedes"* to the development plans of the commercial class, he speculates that "the future inhabitants of this region, wherever they may place their houses, may be sure that they had been anticipated."

Like the urban Federalist, Thoreau does not mean to associate himself with present or future farmers. His dedication to husbandry, on display in "The Bean Field," is in fact

inspired by a civic tradition cultivated in the eighteenth century by the Anglo-American urban bourgeoisie. As J. G. A. Pocock reports, Whig liberals adopted the Catonian ideal of an agrarian republic to argue that virtue, the selfless participation of a citizen in the life of his polity, could be exercised by the members of an urbanized commercial society whose profits advanced the interests of the public. Their inspiration for an actively moral citizenry came from the classical polis, though as first developed in the seventeenth century, "country" ideology did attempt to secure England's status as a republic by invoking a natural basis for virtue in nondependent landholding. But as Britain evolved into an international trading empire, "country" signified an opposition political party whose model republic was less associated with nature than with free commerce. Against speculative, debt-inducing, and state-sponsored monopolist ventures, proponents of a liberalized marketplace envisioned a virtuous society governed by laws of just commerce, of wide distribution of capital, and of equitable exchange. To ameliorate the influence of financial interests in the government, to mitigate the power of the state, and to establish the authority of the public, *Cato's Letters* proposed "agrarian law or something like it." The polity entailed by these laws corresponded not to a farm but to an idealized commercial society whose market exchanges exemplified classical ideals of citizenship.

We readily accept Thoreau's investment in classical politics as determining his relation to pastoralism and agrarianism; as Horkheimer says, his "escape into the woods was conceived by a student of the Greek polis rather than by a peasant." What we should add to this truism is that his understanding of the civic tradition is mediated by the civil discourse of the urban bourgeoisie. Thoreau likewise refuses to distinguish between virtue and commerce, arguing instead that the value of rural life comes from its contribution to civil commerce. In this sense, he too pursues agrarianism, "or something like it." In "The Bean Field," he archly notes the derision his bastardized husbandry elicited from locals and reserves his pride not for his agricultural expertise and certainly not for his noble toil but for $8.72, "the result of my experience in raising beans." This narrowly economic assessment might seem at variance with the disinterested ideals of agrarian republicanism, but Thoreau's interest in farming is to prove Cato's dictum: "the profits of agriculture are particularly pious or just." Such profits are conducive to virtue because they can be obtained without debt, without state capitalization, and particularly without submission to the "slave-driver" within. To the extent that husbandry allows him to maintain his independence from a neomercantilist, slave-driving economy, Thoreau has fulfilled the promise of urban liberalism and made commerce into a medium of virtuous citizenship. In this context, "country" does not denote a natural setting or even a natural economic order. On the contrary, Whigs used agrarian republicanism to place the imprimatur of the civic ideal on their commercial city. By Thoreau's time, this city does not exist in nature, so he is in the strange position of having to imagine a civic space as nature□or, to use an important eighteenth-century distinction, as second nature. Through his ersatz agriculture□indeed, through an imitation of nature□Thoreau wants his readers to look beyond his immediate environs and imagine the unrealized, nonlocalizable realm of the commercial city, wherein profit was in proportion to virtue. There they would find not only the advantages of civilization but the evidence of their own imagination.

Source: Robert Fanuzzi, "Thoreau's Urban Imagination," in *American Literature,* Vol. 68, No. 2, June 1996, pp. 321-29.

In the following essay excerpt, Rowe examines how Thoreau likens human language to other natural phenomena in Walden.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Rowe examines how Thoreau likens human language to other natural phenomena in Walden.

To learn means: to become knowing. In Latin, knowing is qui vidit, one who has seen, has caught sight of something, and who never again loses sight of what he has caught sight of. To learn means: to attain to such seeing. To this belongs our reaching it; namely, on the way, on a journey. To put oneself on a journey, to experience, means to learn

- Heidegger, "Words," On the Way to Language

I have sought to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid. In letters, in journals, in reports of happenings I have recognized new contours suggested by old words so that new names were constituted.

- William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain*

Walden is Thoreau's perfect form; it has the mathematical precision of a musical composition. Thoreau certainly appears to demonstrate in this work the radically formalized truth he had foreseen in an earlier work: "The most distinct and beautiful statement of any truth must take at last the mathe matical form." Walden is "addressed to poor students," who love to play its verbal games and diagram its architectonic order in the place of healthier sport. Such economy and control are rare in the literature of the American Renaissance, which seems better represented by the outwanderings of Whitman or the divine rage of Melville. There is little voyaging here; this is a book of construction and possession: "In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking." All radiates concentrically from this artificial "I," whose insistent presence organizes and determines what we might see. Thoreau has much to say against ownership, but in this book he appropriates nature and brings it within his compass. The writing defines and encloses a Transcendental fiefdom; *Walden* legalizes the everlasting wholeness of natural creation. All seasons speak the same truth in but varied manifestations, so that the poet need only lift the corners of his veils to disclose the divinity in things.

This is a book of discovery, but not of creation. Perhaps it is no accident that the most extended literary discussion concentrates on "Reading" rather than on writing. Of course, Thoreau emphasizes the intimate bond between the two activities: "Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written." Yet, *Walden* is primarily intended as a Baedeker to the order of nature, the primacy of which remains unquestioned. Writing is sacred and mystical in its universal appeal and endurance, but nonetheless secondary to the literal text of nature: "It is the work of art nearest to life itself." "Reading" quickly gives way to "Sounds" more basic to "the language which all

things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard." William Drake writes, "The step from 'Reading' to 'Sounds' is that from the language of men to the 'language' of things, from what can be said about nature, to nature itself." The classics play an important role throughout *Walden,* but they must be put aside in the early stages of Thoreau's ritualized self-purification: "I did not read books the first summer; I hoed beans."

Walden betrays the desire for an established metaphysical center to determine human behavior and organize knowledge. The metaphors of building and clothing appear to offer human beings the freedom of a creative imagination, but such activities are themselves merely techniques for discovering and obeying the dictates of an authoritative Being. Fishing, diving, and mining are basic to this work of reconnaissance: "My instinct tells me that my head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout and fore-paws, and with it I would mine and burrow my way through these hills. I think that the richest vein is somewhere hereabouts; so by the divining rod and thin vapors I judge; and here I will begin to mine." Such deep diving intends to bring to light what is hidden, freeing what has been imprisoned in humans by their faulty methods of perception and cognition. *Awakening* is the avowed aim of *Walden,* and it means the *arising* of truth into consciousness by means of a systematic removal of barriers in order to open a path. For Thoreau, to awaken is to "come into being" rather than to "bring into being." Language facilitates such discovery only to the extent that it serves a prior perception and thus may be made "pertinent" to reality. Metaphor is employed ironically to reveal the "commonsensical" in everyday speech and thus to free us to receive the tangible, literal spirituality that only nature presents. As Drake remarks, "To say that nature has a language, is itself a metaphor. Metaphor as Thoreau speaks of it always defines human experience, *within human bounds.*" Thus, in a work that is nothing but metaphor, Thoreau struggles to destroy the metaphorical in order to allow the presence of the indwelling god to emerge.

The achievement of *Walden* is the result of this confidence that the natural origin of language escapes the symbolism of words and remains eternally and creatively present. In such a bookish work there is remarkably little reflection upon language itself, as if the natural facts were sufficient for the grammar of our lives. There is something disturbingly evasive in such passages as the following from "Higher Laws": "Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead. We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any nobleness begins at once to refine a man's features, any meanness or sensuality to imbrute them." Substituting the body for the materials of the sculptor, Thoreau disparages the symbolic mode of the traditional artist. True art speaks directly in and through natural existence, spontaneously manifesting itself in the life of the artist.

And yet, such sophistry is purchased only by means of an elaborate metaphoric structure yoking temple and body, style and behavior. Thoreau is able to elide the conventional distinctions between body and soul, substance and spirit, only by means of a language that operates by syntagmatic associations and paradigmatic substitutions essential to figurative language. Thoreau may employ language in *Walden* more

cleverly than in any of his other works, but he scrupulously avoids the problematic of language itself. Emerson insists that "Nature is the symbol of spirit," thus suggesting a correspondence between the production of words as "signs of natural facts" and the recognition of "natural facts" as the "symbols of particular spiritual facts." Emerson's view involves a rich and varied language coordinated with natural symbolism; Thoreau's insistence on the ultimate literality of natural facts reduces language to a secondary representation.

There are, of course, many ways in which *Walden* can be read as an extended meditation on the use and abuse of language. In *The Senses of Walden,* Stanley Cavell employs Wittgenstein to interpret *Walden* as the discovery of "what writing is and, in particular, what writing *Walden* is." *Walden* certainly abounds with evidence that selfknowledge is as much a linguistic process as a purely natural one; in fact, the entire work turns on the doubling of the place of Walden in its textual realization. The awakening promised in the epigraph and the spring that concludes the work's seasonal cycles are metaphors for the composition of the text; the dwelling that Thoreau builds is ultimately a house of words. Yet, the aim of this "wording of the world" is a simplicity and clarity that result in the resolution of true self-knowledge.

The discipline of Thoreau's deliberation is equivalent to Wittgenstein's goal of learning how what we say is what we mean. Thoreau relies, however, on his confidence in a fundamental language of Nature from which human speech derives; Wittgenstein's problems are compounded by the fact that his investigations must remain totally within the domain of ordinary language. Wittgenstein must repeat the basic Kantian move of bracketing the thing-in-itself as unknowable, thus shifting the concern of understanding to the development of such internal linguistic distinctions as literal and figurative, grammatical and performative, conventional and original. In *Walden,* Thoreau decidedly does not bracket the thing-in-itself, even though he acknowledges the difficulty of expressing it. Cavell brilliantly suggests that Thoreau provides in Walden that "deduction of the thing-in-itself" that Kant "ought to have provided" as "an essential feature (category) of objectivity itself, viz., that of *a world apart from me* in which objects are met." Transcendental deduction, however, can be performed only on a system of representation; Thoreau's ability to offer such a deduction of objectivity depends upon his confidence in the "language" of Nature, on the possibility of an "objective" language. Thus, Thoreau can assert in *Walden* what Kant in the three critiques only subjunctively "wished" for: that the order of the mind has a structural identity with the order of Nature.

The objectivity of Nature in *Walden* thus secretly governs the subjectivity of human language, which eternally symbolizes that literal origin. Cavell argues that "the externality of the world is articulated by Thoreau as its nextness to me." This idea of the proximity of man and Nature determines Cavell's understanding of philosophical unity in Thoreau: "Unity between these aspects is viewed not as a mutual absorption, but as perpetual nextness, an act of neighboring or befriending." I shall develop a similar notion of metaphysical difference in my Heideggerian reading of *A Week on the Concord* and *Merrimack Rivers,* which draws, as Cavell's reading of *Walden* does, on Thoreau's paradoxical "friendship" (itself a metaphor for self-consciousness) as a complex of proximity and distance.However, I employ Heidegger's metaphor of the

"between" (of earth and sky, of man and nature, of beings and Being), which differs crucially from "nextness."

The "neighborhood" of man and Nature is made possible by the authority of the language of Nature, whose objective and literal presence always exceeds human speech. When we say what we mean, when we speak deliberately, we approach the simplicity of such natural language, and words become facts. But the "between" of man and Nature describes a different space of human dwelling, because this between constitutes a relation that does not exist as a possibility prior to human language. In *Walden,* the language of Nature makes possible human speech, but the human language of *A Week* invents the idea of Nature as part of the measurement of our being. The grounding of human language in an inexpressible natural presence is symbolized in *Walden* in terms of building: a house, a self, a neighborhood with what is. The displacement of natural presence into the "difference" of human language in *A Week* is expressed in metaphors of voyaging, of traveling the between of beings and Being that is measured only by such movement. This "bridging" and "crossing" is the essential activity of metaphor. The text of Walden celebrates its departure from *Walden* as the realization of the natural experiment; the text of *A Week* celebrates the return to Concord as a "fall" into that language that has forever displaced the Nature it set out to discover.

In this description of the spring thaw flowing down the railroad cut, Thoreau offers one of the most extended and self-conscious verbal plays in *Walden.* The intricate blending of natural energies is a metaphor for the act of composition as an interpretation of specific phenomena in Nature: "As it flows it takes the forms of sappy leaves or vines, making heaps of pulpy sprays a foot or more in depth, and resembling, as you look down on them, the laciniated lobed and imbricated thalluses of some lichens; or you are reminded of coral, of leopards' paws or birds' feet, of brains or lungs or bowels, and excrements of all kinds." At such a moment language appears to call forth not only the intricate relations of the natural scene but also the pure metaphorics of such relations. Such poetry seems to constitute the truth of Nature by means of an integrated verbal display that challenges the selfsuf ficiency of natural phenomena. Everything observed seems to contribute to the production of signs that announce their metaphorical powers. Such technical descriptions as "laciniated lobed and imbricated thalluses of some lichens" signify through poetic complexes of alliteration, assonance, consonance, condensation, and syllabic rhythm. Yet, at such a critical moment Thoreau hesitates and then retreats, insisting that the true "artistry" remains external and divine: "I am affected as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and me,□had come to where he was still at work, sporting on this bank, and with an excess of energy strewing his fresh designs about."

Metaphor has made such vision possible, but it is quickly rejected in favor of "such a foliaceous mass as the vitals of the animal body." And as if checking the dangerous excess implied in the verbal dance, Thoreau insists on dissecting words themselves to reveal their natural grounding, effectively emptying them of their autonomous powers:

No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labors with the idea inwardly. The atoms have already learned this law, and are pregnant by it. The overhanging leaf sees here its prototype. *Internally,* whether in the globe or animal body, it is a moist thick lobe, a word especially applicable to the liver and lungs and the leaves of fat (ëåéßù, labor, lapsus, to flow or flow or slip downward, a lapsing;ëoßoó, globus, lobe, globe; also lap, flap, and many other words,) *externally* a dry thin leaf, even as the f and v are a pressed and dried b. The radicals of lobe are lb, the soft mass of the b (single lobed, or B, the double lobed,) with a liquid l behind it pressing it forward. In globe, glb, the gutteral g adds to the meaning the capacity of the throat.

Thoreau's phonemic, phonetic, and etymological analyses serve to restrain the fight of metaphor and situate the imagination within the "facts" of nature. Language is reduced to the physical associations of words and things that reveal a hidden natural form. *Walden* clearly argues for a natural principle of growth and unfolding that denies any sense of completion or closure, but language imitates that organic development only by means of a formal precision with respect to external facts that restricts imaginative play by narrowing the range of authentic (or pertinent) meanings. Emerson avoids some of these dangers by insisting that art is "a nature passed through the alembic of man. Thus in art does Nature work through the will of a man filled with the beauty of her first works." For Emerson, both natural and linguistic symbolisms require a reciprocal interpretation, whereas Thoreau insists on the *presence* of unmediated truth in the earth's "living poetry."

Thus, in *Walden* every impulse to discuss poetics is quickly diverted back to the controlling meditation on the permanence and variety of natural forms. The mastery of this work relies largely on Thoreau's insistence that language and thought would be indistinguishable from natural phenomena if we fully understood our being. In his study of Thoreau, James McIntosh argues that the principal drama in *Walden* is the struggle of the "I" to sustain his integrity in the face of an encompassing natural order. Revisions made between 1847 and 1852 seem to indicate that in the process of composition Thoreau grew "less anxious to write of himself as a part of nature, more intent on asserting his intelligent separateness." But the very diversity and activity that individualize the narrator and his style merely confirm the determining power of the underlying natural forms. The anxiety of alienation is neatly resolved as the *illusion* of separation that properly honed senses may see beyond. Every verbal strategy seems designed to measure and refine the a priori ground of being in nature.

Source: : John Carlos Rowe, "The Being of Language: The Language of Being," in *Henry David Thoreau,* edited by Harold Bloom, Modern Critical Views series, Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, pp. 145-51.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay excerpt, Schwaber describes how readers can "perceive experientially Thoreau's psychic and moral growth" in Walden.

When a man is able to live his philosophy, it becomes more than a theoretical construction of his mind. It becomes his attitude, his way of having experience. Few men achieve this unification of mind, aspiration, and event. Too few, perhaps, even try. Yet some do; and as any reader of our literature knows, one of the very few masterpieces of American writing, Thoreau's *Walden,* has as its subject precisely this attempt.

Though apparently an account of Thoreau's two-year sojourn at Walden Pond, *Walden* reveals his coming of age during the years in which he wrote it. It can be read, therefore, as Henry David Thoreau's spiritual autobiography for the years 1845 to 1854. *Walden* is, of course, more than an account or an autobiography. It is a work of art. Because of its artistry, we are able to perceive experientially Thoreau's psychic and moral growth, and we can begin to understand the relevance of his growth to us.

In 1845 Thoreau built a hut near Walden Pond and moved into it as a practical expediency: he wanted to live inexpensively in order to write and think. He also wanted to feel that he was living excellently. As he explained in the most famous passage in the book, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary." To live essentially meant first of all to distinguish between labor which a man must do in order to survive and respect himself, and labor which he does without realizing that it is aimed at acquiring or preserving things which impede his life because they are not worth the effort they entail. Thoreau thought his neighbors in Concord sacrificed too much of their life energy to this latter type of busy-ness, and he characterized it astutely as "doing penance in a thousand remarkable ways." His interest was in living, not merely in making more than a living. He objected to a man wasting his mind and soul in incessant labor which was intended, ironically enough, to provide for a fuller life. Thoreau thought life too short to postpone it. Perhaps therefore he devoted his first chapter, "Economy," to his radical distinction between essentials and inessentials, or, as he would have believed, between practicalities and impracticalities.

For it was just such a practical problem he faced. He tells us cryptically that his purpose in going to Walden was "to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles." He never tells us directly what this "private business" was, but we may fairly deduce that it had largely to do with protecting, strengthening, and reconstituting his soul. He was then twenty-eight years old and had not yet been able to find a way of getting his living without injuring his spirit. After graduating from Harvard, he taught school, lived with the Ralph Waldo Emersons, lectured before the Concord Lyceum, published in the *Dial,* and went to Staten Island as a tutor in the house of Emerson's brother William; while in New

York he tried to break into the literary market there, but he met with little success; finally he returned home to Concord to work in his father's pencil factory. By none of his varied attempts at earning a living had he managed to live his chosen life as a writer and as a man. The move to Walden afforded a good solution to his economic problem. It seems also to have been an admirable gesture toward the solitude that this young man needed to grow from an apprentice philosopher and a spiritual youth to an independent adult.

Thoreau tells us early in *Walden* that he aspired to live a noble life though most men live mean ones, and, to judge from the resolute tone of the opening chapter, he has a pretty fair idea of how stubbornly he□Henry David Thoreau□has had to proceed toward his goal. Furthermore, he knows the specific qualities of the life to which he aspired. What becomes clear through the course of the book, and what commands our respect for the man and the lessons he would teach us, is that he slowly, patiently, even arduously, attains that life he values and by which he judged the lives of his neighbors to be insufficient models for him to follow.

What did Thoreau judge to be the salient qualities of essential life□once, that is, a man has attended honorably to life's physical necessities? Though he spends a good deal of the first chapter sniping at inessentials, he points to two compendious values. The first is self-reliance, the quality of soul to which a man wins through by consciously struggling for it: "I am resolved," he writes with exaggerative humor and undoubted seriousness, "that I will not through humility become the devil's attorney. I will endeavor to speak a good word for the truth." A self-reliant man can bear to be free, and only such a man is ready to love and respect other men: "I am wont to think that men are not so much the keepers of herds as herds are the keepers of men, the former are so much freer." "Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluous coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. . . Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men."

The second of Thoreau's compendious values is more elusive, doubtless because it cannot be taken by frontal assault, however arduous: "In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and the future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line." Near the end of the book he reiterates: "We should be blessed if we lived in the present always, and took advantage of every accident that befell us, like the grass which confesses the influence of the slightest dew which falls on it; and did not spend our time in atoning for the neglect of past opportunities, which we call doing our duty." The present moment fully lived does not admit of penance for past deeds or omissions; nor does it admit of postponement now in favor of future gratifications, whether secular or religious. The present is not for self-chastisement or even for earnest and studious attempts to make the future better. In short, a man lives well only when he is at peace with himself, which is to say when he is without anxiety; and Thoreau knew that for some people anxiety is a "well nigh incurable disease." As he wrote in his journal, "It would be glorious to see mankind at leisure for once."

To the lives of quiet desperation that he refused to imitate he contrasted a life of joyous and manly independence in the present. Instead of committing himself to responsibilities of past and future, such as "inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools," commitments which enslave a man's spirit, Thoreau asserted proudly that he was a "sojourner" in the woods and in civilized society. A skeptical, canny, and withal hopeful man, he insisted on finding for himself what life was about by living it: "Here is life, an experiment to a great extent untried by me; . . . [M]an's capacities have never been measured, . . . [we cannot] judge of what he can do by any precedents, so little has been tried." The sojourner and experimenter alone can feel pleasure, the feeling that more than all others eluded his contemporaries; Thoreau remarked that their very games concealed "stereotyped but unconscious despair. . . There is no play in them." He insisted that a man's life should include the joy that can come only with living□which includes working□as a man should. And joy for Thoreau meant lyrical participation and even playfulness: "Children, who play life, discern its true law and relations more clearly than men, who fail to live it worthily, but who think that they are wiser by experience, that is by failure." "I had this advantage, at least, in my mode of life, over those who were obliged to look abroad for amusement, to society and the theater, that my life itself was become my amusement and never ceased to be novel."

Critical Essay #5

Thoreau thus rejected the practices and assumptions of his neighbors in Concord with good cause. He had the courage to be as radical, or as eccentric, as he had to be. His protest, to use Whitehead's phrase in a new context, was "a protest on behalf of value." The goal he set for himself was compounded of utilitarian skills and spiritual ease. He envisioned a life of manly independence, which he understood to be the prerequisite for freedom and love, and of full experience of the ripeness of the moment lived.

I have said that in *Walden* we see Thoreau move toward and, I think, reach the goal he set for himself in the early part of the book. That movement is the great moral development of the book. And that moral development is central to the book's aesthetic excellence.

So much perceptive comment has been written in recent years in appreciation of *Walden's* artistry□its stylistic aptness and its structural and imagistic unity□that one must wonder if he has anything more to add. I need only mention here how the themes of wildness and civilized control, privacy and sociability, freedom and servitude, and joy and despair alternate and interrelate; how images of night and sleep are contrasted with those of morning and wakefulness, and how these images become metaphors for spiritual conditions; how Thoreau's two-year experience at Walden and some of his subsequent experiences are presented as transpiring in one year; and how the passage of the year from summer to spring is made to coincide symbolically with the details of Thoreau's activity and with the rebirth of his spirit. I would suggest, however, that Thoreau's rebirth of spirit accords with the life he values and that the moral development of the book thus provides its dramatic unity. As we read on in *Walden* we became witnesses to Thoreau's dramatic, though quiet, psychic development. It is reflected in the changes that are evident in his tone of voice and in the quality and type of his responses to the things about him.

At the beginning of the book Thoreau speaks as a man apart, though, as the act of writing itself and even his acerbic humor would suggest, he is never cut off entirely from some good feeling for his fellow men. He writes, as he is the first to admit, about himself and what he did. His tone as he tells of moving out of Concord to Walden Pond alternates between defiance, scolding, and preaching; it is always resolute. One assumes that he is so insistent because he knows the truth and wants to be heard. But why so harsh a tone? Why so argumentative a rebellion? He seems to attack his neighbors' way of life and to defend his own at least as much as he celebrates it. Perhaps he is not so sure of himself as he would like to be. His distinction between a professor of philosophy (one who has subtle thoughts and professes what is admirable) and a philosopher (one who lives admirably) is helpful. To be a philosopher is "so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life not only theoretically, but practically." In the long first chapter of Walden, Thoreau breaks idols, teaches, and asserts, but to use his own distinction, he sounds more like a professor than a philosopher:

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than gotten rid of . . . Who made them serfs to the soil? . . . They have got to live a man's life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well-nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and wood lot.

This is the tone of a reformer of others rather than of himself. Thoreau can be astute in his social criticism, as he is in the passage just quoted or when he attacks the factory system of production for having as its object not necessary and useful goods for men but profits for corporations. But it was not as a reformer of systems or of other men that Thoreau wished to live; and, as can be seen from his statements about philanthropy and abolition in the first chapter, he thought that the only reform that was both honorable and possible was self-reform. Whatever influence he might have on other men would be the result of the example and not the form of his self-reform. "I never dreamed of any enormity greater than I have committed. I never knew, and never shall know, a worse man than myself." The man's honesty is breathtaking. Henry David Thoreau was problem enough for him to solve. Yet his tone in the first chapter suggests that when he went to Walden he was only within shouting distance of the mode of life he valued most highly.

Mid-way through the book, in "The Village," Thoreau provides further suggestion of a deep inner uneasiness which has yet to be assuaged. He writes that walking in the village seemed to him like running a gauntlet and that at such times the woods afforded him snug haven. By the time he reaches the concluding chapter, however, he has grown signifi-cantly. Not that he is unrecognizable. He still confronts us as a moral teacher who exhorts us to live well. What has changed is his attitude. He encourages rather than scolds; he is assertive but not biting. He is, above all, magisterially confident for himself and presumably for all who have attended to him. He is not sentimentally optimistic, for he has directed his eye inward and he remembers what he has seen. Instead he is stubbornly and stoically hopeful: "However mean your life is, meet it and live it; . . . Love your life, poor as it is." Though he remains at odds with the habitual and wrong attitudes and institutions of men, he is not nearly as prickly as he has been. He seems more aware of the humanity of his listeners than formerly and no longer to be alone in the universe of men; he writes as if he can assume agreement or sympathy in at least some of his readers. And it is these men of kindred spirit□his sympathetic readers□whom he invites to the most perilous task of all, the exploration of their own souls: "Herein are demanded the eye and the nerve. Only the defeated and deserters go to wars, cowards that run away and enlist."

Having begun by lecturing somewhat shrilly and telling of his move away from his townsmen to care for his embattled soul, Thoreau ends his book by returning to town and by reaching out, in his own way, to his neighbors. A wiser, stronger, and shrewder man than he had been, he is now more at peace with himself because more in tune with his aspirations and, therefore, more amiably disposed toward the men and women with whom he will be living again. Now at last he can brag for mankind "as lustily as

chanticleer in the morning." The final words of Walden glisten with hope and possibility, with courage, and with implied will: "[S]uch is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star."

Source: Paul Schwaber, "Thoreau's Development in *Walden,*" in *Criticism,* Vol. V, No. 1, Winter 1963, pp. 64-70.

Topics for Further Study

Would you want to spend a year or two living as Thoreau lived at Walden Pond? Why or why not?

Thoreau refers to Greek and Roman gods and goddesses and to Hindu gods and scriptures throughout *Walden.* Do research to learn about these two religious systems and then explain why you think Thoreau made frequent references to them. What aspects and elements of these religions make them compatible with Thoreau's ideas?

Thoreau kept detailed financial records to show how much money he earned and how much he spent on various things. What does this tell you about him? Does this trait seem consistent with other aspects of Thoreau's philosophy and behavior, or not? Explain your answer.

Spend a period of time□an hour or a day□in natural surroundings and away from other people as much as possible. Your "Walden" may be a backyard or a park. Take notes on what you observe. Later, write an essay about your experience in which you include both information from your notes and reflections about how the experience affected you.

Imagine that you are Thoreau and have just been set down in the middle of an airport in a big American city in the twenty-first century. Write a page in your journal describing what you see, hear, and feel.

Compare and Contrast

1850s: Walden Pond (about half a mile long and with a total area of about sixty-one acres) and much of the land immediately around it are owned by Ralph Waldo Emerson. While the land was once heavily forested, many of the trees are being cut down as fuel. The particularly cold winter of 1851-1852 takes a heavy toll on Walden Woods. The few local residents are described by Thoreau in Walden, including a fortune teller, a potter, and railroad workers. People who live in Concord, a mile and a half away, come out to the pond to fish and swim, and they use the surrounding land for hunting, berry picking, and picnicking, as well as for a source of fuel.

Today: Walden Pond and the land around it are a National Historical and Literary Landmark owned by the state of Massachusetts. (The Emerson family donated the land to the state in 1922 so that it would be preserved.) The land is the site of the Thoreau Institute, which has a twelve-thousand-square-foot Education Center and a fivethousand-square-foot Research Center on the grounds, housing a reading room, archives, staff offices, and other facilities. About 750,000 people visit the site each year. Walden Pond is still used for swimming.

1850s: In Walden, Thoreau recalls hearing trains' whistles as they passed the western end of Walden Pond during his stay, and he describes the many ways in which railroads are changing American life. By 1850, there are 9,022 miles of operable track, virtually all built in the last twenty years. On February 22, 1854□the year in which Walden is published□a train travels from the East Coast to the Mississippi River for the first time.

Today: The United States has 230,000 miles of operable track, 1.2 million freight cars, and twenty thousand locomotives.

1850s: Transcendentalism, which borrows elements of Eastern philosophies and religions, has a devoted following in Massachusetts and influences many American intellectuals and writers.

Today: Yoga is increasingly popular throughout the United States. Yoga is the Sanskrit word for "union." The various schools of yoga taught today have some commonalities with transcendentalism, such as the beliefs that each individual soul is directly linked to God and that truth is everywhere present in creation and can be experienced intuitively, rather than rationally. While millions of Americans practice only one element of yoga□its regimen of physical postures and exercises□a growing number are adopting the broader philosophy and more of its practices, such as meditation and vegetarianism.

What Do I Read Next?

"Walden" and Other Writings, edited by Brooks Atkinson and with an excellent introduction by Ralph Waldo Emerson, is a collection of Thoreau's major works, including additional nature writing and political essays such as "Civil Disobedience" and "A Plea for Captain John Brown." First published in 1937, the collection was republished in a new edition in 2000.

Essays: First and Second Series (1990), edited by Douglas Crase, collects the major essays of Thoreau's mentor and friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson. These essays were originally published in two separate volumes in 1841 and 1844, and they express philosophies and attitudes very similar to those found in Walden.

My First Summer in the Sierra (1911), by John Muir, is the most popular work of the famous conservationist and, along with Walden, is a classic American nature journal. Muir was just a young man in 1869, when he spent the summer helping to drive a large flock of sheep through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Years later, when his diary of that summer was published, it inspired thousands of Americans to visit the area that later became Yosemite National Park.

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (1974), by Annie Dillard, is sometimes cast as a modern Walden. In it, Dillard records observations made over the course of a year at Tinker Creek in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. The book won a Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction.

Leaves of Grass (1855), by Walt Whitman, was published the year after Walden. It celebrates nature and the American landscape in poetry much as Thoreau's work does in prose.

Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy from childhood to adulthood. The Marches are transcendentalists who value self-reliance, individualism, compassion, and education above material and social achievement.

Further Study

Myerson, Joel, *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau,* Cambridge University Press, 1995.

In addition to essays covering all of Thoreau's major works, this volume also includes essays discussing the author's friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson, his changing reputation over the years, and other topics.

Richardson, Robert D., Jr., *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind,* University of California Press, 1986.

This well-reviewed and highly regarded biography includes discussions of *Walden* and Thoreau's other major works.

Smith, David Clyde, *The Transcendental Saunterer: Thoreau and the Search for Self,* Frederic C. Beil, Inc., 1997. .

Versluis, *Arthur, American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions,* Oxford University Press on Demand, 1997.

Part of the Oxford Press Religion in America series, this book covers the beginning of Transcendentalist Orientalism in Europe and the complete history of American Transcendentalism to the twentieth century, with a focus on how Asian religions and cultures have influenced transcendentalism in the West.

Bibliography

Bagnall, Nicholas, Review of *Walden,* in *New Statesman,* December 5, 1997, p. 57.

"New Publications," in *Boston Daily Journal,* August 10, 1854, p. 1.

"New Publications," in *Salem Register,* August 10, 1854, p. 2.

Trent, W. P., J. Erskine, S. P. Sherman, and C. Van Doren, eds., "Thoreau, Walden," in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes,* Vol. 16, Oxford University Press, 1907-21.

"Walden; or, Life in the Woods," in *Lowell Journal and Courier,* August 10, 1854, p. 2.

White, E. B., "A Slight Sound at Evening," in The Points of My Compass, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1962.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Nonfiction Classics for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) 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, NCfS 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 NCfS 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 NCfS 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 NCfS 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 NCfS 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

NCfS 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 Nonfiction Classics 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 NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS 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 Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics 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 NCfS 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.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics 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 NCfS, 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 Nonfiction Classics 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 NCfS, 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 Nonfiction Classics 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:

Editor, Nonfiction Classics for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535