

# Henry David Thoreau (1817-62)

Resisted  
materialism,  
chose a life  
of simplicity,  
close to  
nature.



# Henry David Thoreau (1817-62)

- A Harvard graduate
- Stayed at Emerson's house for 2 years
- Published *Walden* in 1854, 7 copies sold
- Never married
- Lived according to conscience. Emerson was conventional and cautious. Thoreau spoke on behalf of John Brown and helped runaway slaves.
- From 1940s on, Thoreau's reputation eclipsed Emerson's.



# By the way

- Many scholars consider Thoreau to be the father of the American conservation and preservation movements. In his essay “Walking” Thoreau claims, “in Wildness is the preservation of the world.”



Original  
Title  
Page of  
*Walden*

WALDEN;  
OR,  
LIFE IN THE WOODS.

BY HENRY D. THOREAU,  
AUTHOR OF "A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS."

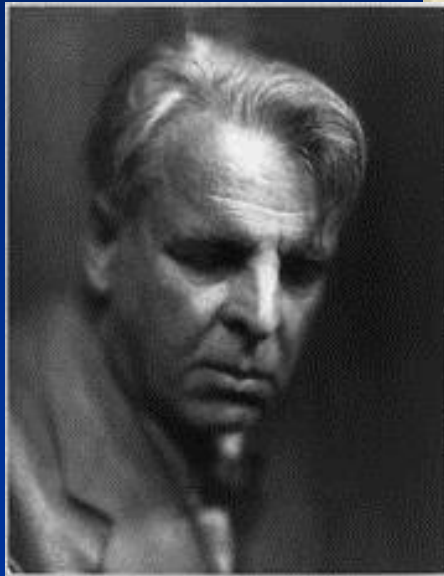


I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up. — Page 92.

BOSTON:  
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.

M DCCC LIV.

# William Butler Yeats



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Butler\\_Yeats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Butler_Yeats)

# The Lake Isle of Innisfree

- I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and  
wattles made:
- Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for  
the honey-bee;
- And live alone in the bee-loud glade....





Concord Village



# Coleridge's

## “Dejection: an Ode” (1802)

- Trimeter to pentameter
- ABBA CC
- Nature: What he thought was in Nature was actually a product solely of his own mind.



# *Walden* (1854)

- *Walden* shows the reader how to live wisely in a world designed to make wise living impossible.
- From 1845 to 1847, Thoreau lived near Walden Pond, to make the philosophy of transcendentalism into reality. In *Walden* his life at the pond is compressed into the cycle of one year, from spring to spring.



# Guide for the Mind

- “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” (906).



# Guide for the Mind

- “I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartanlike as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world;



- or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion” (906).



# Guide for the Mind

- “Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man had hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumbnail” (906).



# Why he Left

- “Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pondside; and though
- It is five or six years since I trod it, it is



- still quite distinct. It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressionable by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin



- passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains” (928).





# Surveying the bottom of Walden

- “As I was desirous to recover the long lost bottom of Walden Pond, I surveyed it carefully, before the ice broke up, early in '46, with compass and chain and sounding line. There have been many stories told about the bottom, or rather no bottom, of this pond, which certainly had no foundation for themselves.... I fathomed it easily with a cod-line and a stone



- Weighing about a pound and a half, and could tell accurately when the stone left the bottom, by having to pull so much harder before the water got underneath to help me. The greatest depth was exactly one hundred and two feet; to which may be added the five feet which it has risen since, making one hundred and seven.... I am thankful that this pond was made **deep and pure** for a symbol. While



- Men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless” (Thoreau *Walden and Civil Disobedience* 189).



# “Resistance to Civil Government”

- Important passages: p. 843, 844, 848-49, 852, 854
- Among the influenced people: Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mandela
- 1. 1846-48, the Mexican War
- 2. 1846, Thoreau refused to pay his poll tax to show his disapproval of the war and the enforcement of slavery laws. (He owed \$1.50.) Landed in jail.

# Questions

- Where is Walden Pond located?
- How long did Thoreau live there?
- What are some questions people asked Thoreau when he returned to civilization.
- What was his goal in living alone in the wilderness?



# Question

- Why did Thoreau go to live in the woods?



# Question

- What complaints does Thoreau have about American life?



# Question

- What relationships do you find between Emerson's and Thoreau's's essays? Do they share a similar vision of nature? Of America? Would Thoreau qualify as Emerson's's American scholar?





# Question

- What is the best government and why?



# Question

- What is the Walden Pond a symbol of? And the ice that Thoreau had to break open in order to find out the depth of Walden?
- “A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature” (Thoreau *Walden and Civil Disobedience* 125).



# Question

- What is the significance of Thoreau's house? The significance of his building his own house?



# Question

- Why does Thoreau emphasize animals' human characteristics?



# Question

- What is “civil disobedience”?



# Links

- <http://www.usmh.usmd.edu/thoreau/>
- [Cybersaunter: Thoreau World Wide](#)  
University of Maryland site hosts a comprehensive biography of Thoreau, with sections including Formal Education, Employment & Jobs, and Friends & Love Interests.



<http://www.geocities.com/freereligion/1thoreau.html>

- [Henry David Thoreau \(1817-1862\): A Guide to Resources](#) Collection of links to biographies, portraits, cybertexts of all of Thoreau's works, commentary, analysis, and biography on the Net.



<http://libws66.lib.niu.edu/thoreau/>

- [The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau](#) The online presence of the Thoreau Edition, an academic project which seeks to recover his lost words and create definitive editions of existing works. Includes the biographic "Life and Times of Henry D. Thoreau," analysis in "Reflections on Walden," and a "Thoreau FAQ."





<http://www2.cybernex.com/%7Erienat/ignored.html>

- [Thoreau Information](#) Links to a large number of writings by Thoreau, analyses of Thoreau by other writers, and various writing inspired by Thoreau.



<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng385/walden/chap1.htm>

- [Study Text of Walden](http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng385/walden/chap1.htm) Online critical edition of Walden, with comprehensive notes on the various literary allusions, historical circumstances, and in-depth analysis of the text.

