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Transcendentalism

BY RALPH WALDO EMERSON & HENRY DAVID THOREAU



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Terminology

Objective: Understanding terminology

Activity

The word *Transcendentalism* is long and made up of several different parts that, when put together, encapsulate an idea or belief. The suffix *-ism* means “doctrine” or “theory,” so we know the rest of the word will tell us what the doctrine or theory is about. The letters *ental* mean “of or relating to,” and we can further see that we are going to read about a doctrine or theory that relates to what is spelled out at the beginning of the word.

In the word *experimental*, for example, we can infer that we are going to read about something that relates to an experiment. If we add the suffix *-ism*, we expect to learn something about experimentalism (the theory that makes use of trial and error to determine the validity of ideas).

In the space that follows, make up some new doctrines or theories using the words listed. Follow that with five of your own discovery, and explain each one.

Example:

excel: *excellentalism* – the belief in the theory of being the best at a given task.

fragment: *fragmentalism* – the belief in the theory of the importance of little pieces

incident: *incidentalism* – the theory that one happening is as important as another

fundamental: *fundamentalism* – the doctrine of living by rigid adherence to basic principles

accident: *accidentalism* – the theory that accidents happen for a vital reason

provident: *providentialism* – the theory that lives are controlled by divine intervention

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Self-Reliance**Essay Writing**

Objectives: Identifying key concepts within the text
Writing an essay

Activity

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

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

Name: _____

Date: _____

Self-Reliance

Found Poem

Objective: Composing a “found” poem

Activity

A “found” poem is made up entirely from phrases, sentences, or quotations found in the text. Go back through the text, and compose a “found” poem from Emerson’s “Self-Reliance.” Your poem can relate to the essay, or it can be about anything else that you would like to write about.

Your poem should be about ten lines long, and the lines do not need to rhyme, but they certainly may. You can arrange phrases from the essay in any way you like. You can also change the punctuation and the order of the phrases; however, you cannot change any of Emerson’s actual words. Title your poem. The title can come from the essay or be one of your own creation. The following is an example:

“Trust Thyself”

In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts,
Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.
A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.
Your general action will explain itself,
Your conformity explains nothing.
If we live truly, we shall see truly.
To believe your own thought,
That is genius.
Society everywhere is in conspiracy,
I must be myself.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Walden: Where I Lived and What I Lived For

Cryptogram

Objective: Reviewing main ideas

Activity

Through this section, Thoreau presents his main ideas that continue throughout the book. Complete the following cryptogram to discover why Thoreau decided to live in the woods. To complete this puzzle, fill in the answers, and unscramble each circled letter to create the answer to the final question. The first question has been done for you.

CRYPTOGRAM

What word does Thoreau repeat to explain how he thinks people should live their lives?

1. Why did Thoreau go into the Woods?

He wanted to live deliberately

2. What Farm did Thoreau consider before he selected Walden Pond?

---O-----

3. What did Thoreau use to buy the farms?

-----O---

4. Why did Thoreau put his two-year experiment, into a one-year format?

-----O--

5. What day did Thoreau move into his cabin?

-----O

6. What simile does Thoreau use to describe how we live our lives?

---O-----

7. When is Thoreau most awake?

---O-----

Name: _____

Date: _____

Walden: Higher Laws

Creating a Menu

Objective: Developing a menu based on information from the text

Activity

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

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