

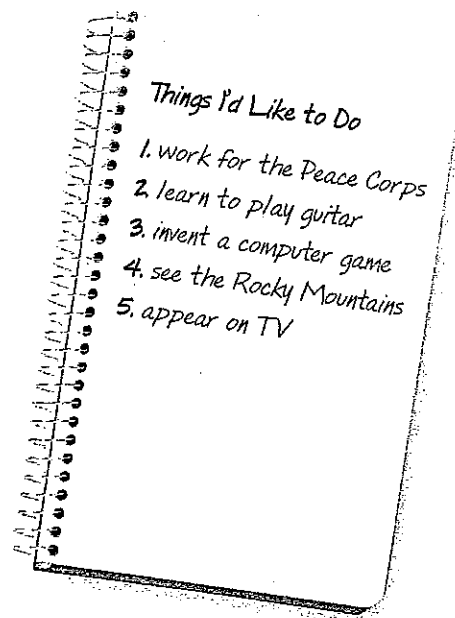
PREVIEWING

NONFICTION

from *Walden* Henry David Thoreau

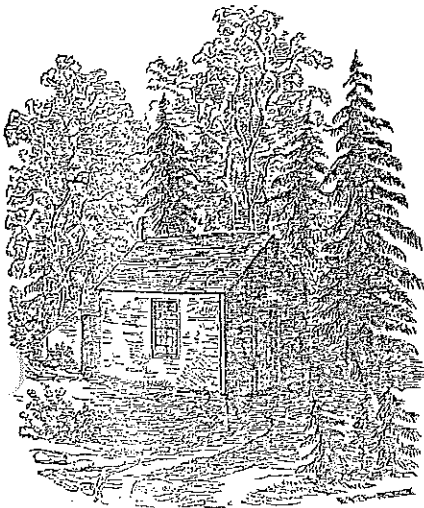
PERSONAL CONNECTION

What do you want to experience in your life? In your notebook, make a list of some experiences you look forward to. Then pick three of the experiences and explain to your classmates why you want to have each one.



GEOGRAPHICAL CONNECTION

Like Ralph Waldo Emerson and other transcendentalists, Thoreau felt a need to confirm his unity with nature. On July 4, 1845, he began his famous experiment in what he thought of as "essential" living—living simply, studying the natural world, and seeking truth within himself. On land owned by Emerson near Concord, Massachusetts, Thoreau built a small cabin by Walden Pond and lived there for more than two years, writing and studying nature. *Walden*—a mixture of philosophy, autobiography, and meditation upon nature—is the record of Thoreau's experiences at the pond.



Thoreau's cabin, 10 by 15 feet, was smaller than a one-car garage of today. The Bettmann Archive.

READING CONNECTION

Appreciating Aphorisms These excerpts from *Walden*, like the preceding excerpt from Emerson's "Self-Reliance," contain a number of aphorisms—brief statements that express general principles or truths about life. As you read the selection, look for some aphorisms that relate to your ideas and experiences. Jot them down in your notebook, and be prepared to share them with classmates.

FROM

Walden

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

FROM

Where I Lived, and What I Lived For



5

10

When first I took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there, which, by accident, was on Independence day, or the fourth of July, 1845, my house was not finished for winter, but was merely a defense against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough weather-stained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night. The upright white hewn studs and freshly planed door and window casings gave it a clean and airy look, especially in the morning, when its timbers were saturated with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude from them. . . .

*gap between logs
in a log cabin*



GUIDE FOR READING

22 **tarn:** a small mountain lake or pool.

27-28 **nocturnal conventicle** (kən-vēn'tŷ-kəl): a secret religious meeting held at night.

30-42 What are Thoreau's reasons for moving to the woods?

35-36 **marrow:** the central, most essential part; literally, the soft tissue inside a bone.

36 **Spartan-like:** in a simple, economical, and disciplined way, like the inhabitants of the ancient Greek city-state of Sparta.

37 **cut a broad swath and shave close:** gather as much of the essence of life as possible.

45 **chief end of man here:** most important purpose of human life on earth.

47 **the fable:** a Greek myth in which Zeus changes ants into men.

48-49 **like pygmies . . . cranes:** a reference to a legend, mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*, about the continual battles fought by a race of dwarfs against cranes.

50 **evitable** (ēv'Y-tē-bəl): avoidable.

53-54 What is Thoreau's remedy for our hectic, detail-crowded lives?

I was seated by the shore of a small pond, about a mile and a half south of the village of Concord and somewhat higher than it, in the midst of an extensive wood between that town and Lincoln, and about two miles south of that our only field known to fame, Concord Battle Ground; but I was so low in the woods that the opposite shore, half a mile off, like the rest, covered with wood, was my most distant horizon. For the first week, whenever I looked out on the pond it impressed me like a **tarn** high up on the side of a mountain, its bottom far above the surface of other lakes, and, as the sun arose, I saw it throwing off its nightly clothing of mist, and here and there, by degrees, its soft ripples or its smooth reflecting surface was revealed, while the mists, like ghosts, were stealthily withdrawing in every direction into the woods, as at the breaking up of some **nocturnal conventicle**. The very dew seemed to hang upon the trees later into the day than usual, as on the sides of mountains. . . .

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. I wanted to live deep and **suck out all the marrow of life**, to live so sturdily and **Spartan-like** 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. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have *somewhat hastily* concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has 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

WORDS TO KNOW

deliberately (dĭ-lĭb'ər-ŷt-lē) *adv.* in an unhurried and thoughtful manner
resignation (rĕz'ŷg-nā'shən) *n.* an acceptance of something as unavoidable
mean (mēn) *adj.* inferior in quality, value, or importance
sublime (sə-blĭm') *adj.* of high spiritual, moral, or intellectual worth; noble

half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumbnail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. . . .

60
65 Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry. Men say that a stitch in time saves nine, and so they take a thousand stitches today to save nine to-morrow. As for *work*, we haven't any of any consequence. We have the Saint Vitus' dance, and cannot possibly keep our heads still. If I should only give a few pulls at the parish bell-rope, as for a fire, that is, without setting the bell, there is hardly a man on his farm in the outskirts of Concord, notwithstanding that press of engagements which was his excuse so many times this morning, nor a boy, nor a
70 woman, I might almost say, but would forsake all and follow that sound, not mainly to save property from the flames, but, if we will confess the truth, much more to see it burn, since burn it must, and we, be it known, did not set it on fire,—or to see it put out, and have a hand in it, if that is done as handsomely;
75 yes, even if it were the parish church itself. Hardly a man takes a half hour's nap after dinner, but when he wakes he holds up his head and asks, "What's the news?" as if the rest of mankind had stood his sentinels. Some give directions to be waked every half hour, doubtless for no other purpose; and then, to pay for
80 it, they tell what they have dreamed. After a night's sleep the news is as indispensable as the breakfast. "Pray tell me any thing new that has happened to a man any where on this globe,"—and he reads it over his coffee and rolls, that a man has had his eyes gouged out this morning on the Wachito River;
85 never dreaming the while that he lives in the dark unfathomed mammoth cave of this world, and has but the rudiment of an eye himself.

For my part, I could easily do without the post-office. I think that there are very few important communications made
90 through it. To speak critically, I never received more than one or two letters in my life—I wrote this some years ago—that were worth the postage. The penny post is, commonly, an institution through which you seriously offer a man that penny for his

59 **founder**: to sink like a ship.

60-61 **dead reckoning**: guesswork. The term, used by sailors, describes a method of estimating a ship's position when the stars cannot be seen.

69 **Saint Vitus' (vī'tes) dance**: a disorder of the nervous system, characterized by rapid, jerky, involuntary movements.

80-92 What situation is Thoreau exaggerating here?

89 **Wachito River**: a river (now called the Ouachita) in northern Louisiana and southern Arkansas. In Thoreau's time, it was believed that violent men went to that region to escape from the law.

97-99 Thoreau jokingly connects the postage rate (a penny per letter at the time) with the phrase "a penny for your thoughts." What is the point of his joke?

WORDS
TO
KNOW

rudiment (rōō'də-mənt) *n.* an imperfect or undeveloped form

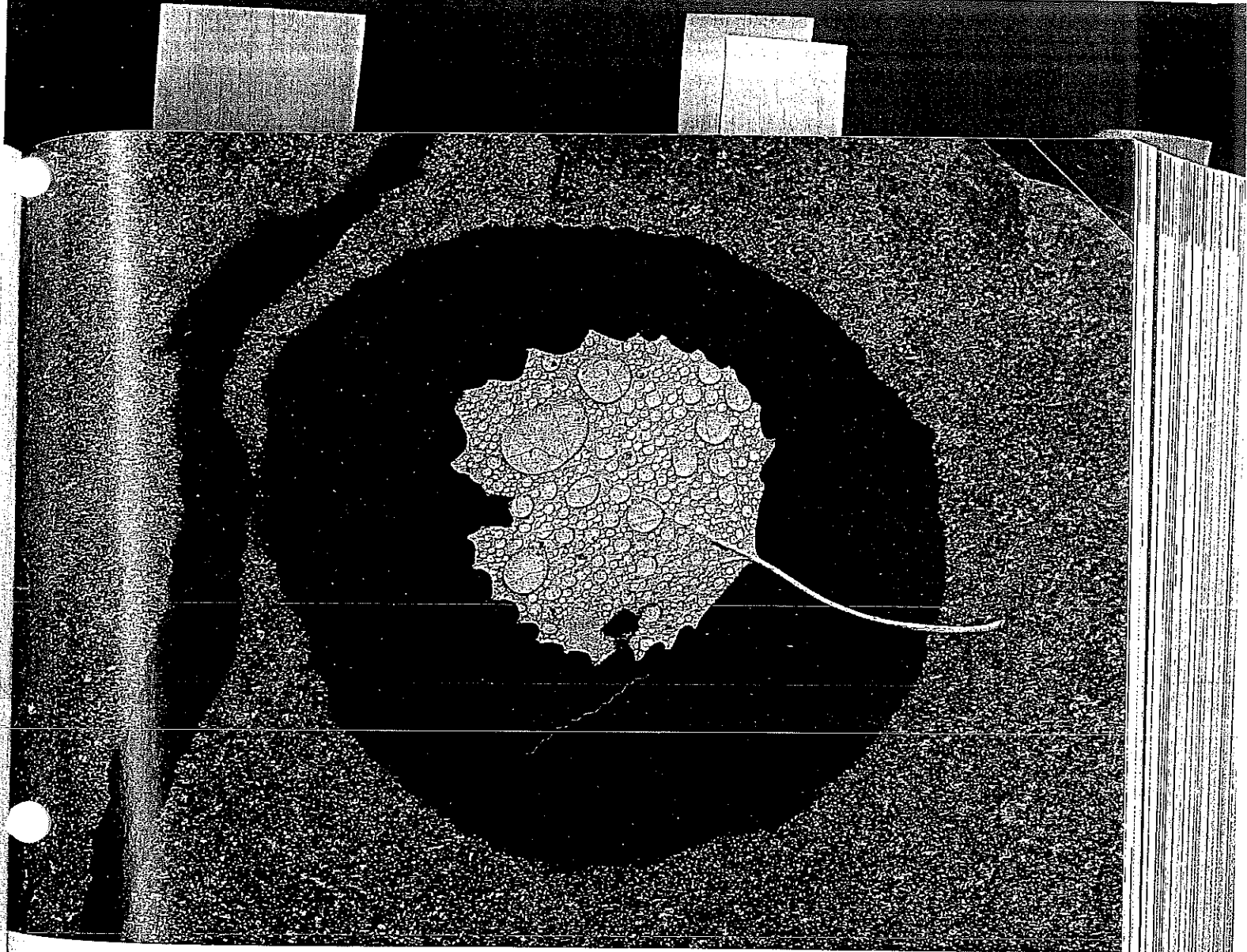


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thoughts which is so often safely offered in jest. And I am sure
100 that I never read any memorable news in a newspaper. If we
read of one man robbed, or murdered, or killed by accident, or
one house burned, or one vessel wrecked, or one steamboat
blown up, or one cow run over on the Western Railroad, or one
mad dog killed, or one lot of grasshoppers in the winter,—we
105 never need read of another. One is enough. . . .

Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be
thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that
falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently
and without perturbation; let company come and let company
110 go, let the bells ring and the children cry,—determined to make
a day of it. . . .

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but
while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it

112-126 Thoreau says that we do not have much time on earth. What does he say he wants to spend his time trying to understand? How does he feel that he can find some of the answers he seeks?

WORDS
TO
KNOW

perturbation (pûr'ter-bâ'shen) *n.* a disturbance of the emotions; agitation; uneasiness.

is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would
115 drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars.
I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I
have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I
was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way
120 into the secret of things. I do not wish to be any more busy with
my hands than is necessary. My head is hands and feet. I feel all
my best faculties concentrated in it. 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
125 way through these hills. I think that the richest vein is some-
where hereabouts; so by the divining rod and thin rising vapors
I judge; and here I will begin to mine.

125 divining rod: a forked stick that is believed to indicate the presence of underground water.

FROM *Solitude*



130

This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt sleeves, though it is cool as

130-145 What does Thoreau say he is part of, and why does he feel as he does?

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well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whippoorwill is borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The
145 repose is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit, now roam the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature's watchmen,—links which connect the days of animated life. . . .

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WORDS
TO
KNOW

congenial (kən-gēn'yəi) *adj.* suited to one's needs or nature; agreeable
serenity (sə-rēn'ī-tē) *n.* a mental and spiritual calm; tranquillity

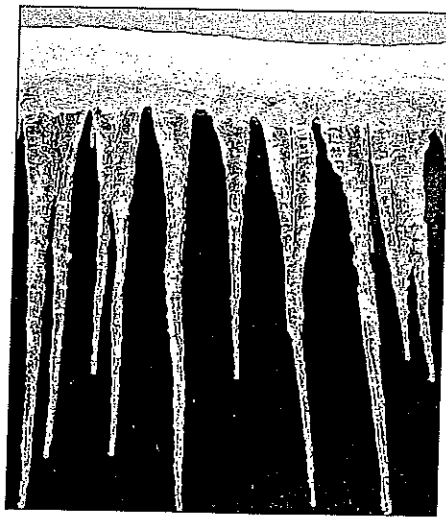
150 Men frequently say to me, "I should think you would feel
lonesome down there, and want to be nearer to folks, rainy and
snowy days and nights especially." I am tempted to reply to
such,—This whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in
space. How far apart, think you, dwell the two most distant
155 inhabitants of yonder star, the breadth of whose disk cannot be
appreciated by our instruments? Why should I feel lonely? is not
our planet in the Milky Way? This which you put seems to me
not to be the most important question. What sort of space is
that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him
160 solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two
minds much nearer to one another. . . .

153-160 Thoreau suggests that because we are all in this life together, the physical distance between us is insignificant.

FROM *The Pond in Winter*

Every winter the liquid and trembling surface of the pond, which
was so sensitive to every breath, and reflected every light and
shadow, becomes solid to the depth of a foot or a foot and a
165 half, so that it will support the heaviest teams, and perchance the
snow covers it to an equal depth, and it is not to be distinguished
from any level field. Like the marmots in the surrounding hills, it
closes its eye-lids and becomes dormant for three months or
more. Standing on the snow-covered plain, as if in a pasture
170 amid the hills, I cut my way first through a foot of snow, and
then a foot of ice, and open a window under my feet, where,
kneeling to drink, I look
down into the quiet parlor
of the fishes, pervaded by a
softened light as through a
175 window of ground glass,
with its bright sanded floor,
the same as in summer;
there a perennial waveless
serenity reigns as in the
180 amber twilight sky, corre-
sponding to the cool and
even temperament of the
inhabitants. Heaven is
185 under our feet as well as
over our heads. . . .

167 marmots: rodents that hibernate in the winter; groundhogs.



WORDS
TO
KNOW

perennial (pə-rĕn'ĕ-əl) *adj.* lasting through the year or through many years; enduring

FROM

Spring

One attraction in coming to the woods to live was that I should have leisure and opportunity to see the spring come in. The ice in the pond at length begins to be honey-combed, and I can set
190 my heel in it as I walk. Fogs and rains and warmer suns are gradually melting the snow; the days have grown sensibly longer; and I see how I shall get through the winter without adding to my woodpile, for large fires are no longer necessary. I am on the alert for the first signs of spring, to hear the chance
195 note of some arriving bird, or the striped squirrel's chirp, for his stores must be now nearly exhausted, or see the woodchuck venture out of his winter quarters. . . .

The change from storm and winter to serene and mild weather, from dark and sluggish hours to bright and elastic ones, is a
200 memorable crisis which all things proclaim. It is seemingly instantaneous at last. Suddenly an influx of light filled my house, though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with sleety rain. I looked out the window, and lo! where yesterday was cold
205 gray ice there lay the transparent pond already calm and full of hope as in a summer evening, reflecting a summer evening sky in its bosom, though none was visible overhead, as if it had intelligence with some remote horizon. . . .

191 sensibly; noticeably.

200 crisis: turning point.

FROM

Conclusion

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it
210 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 pond-side; and though
215 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 impressible 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,
220 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

209-211 Why does Thoreau leave the woods?

220-223 On a sailing ship, passengers stayed in private compartments near the middle of the ship, while the crew shared living quarters at the front ("before the mast"). What is Thoreau comparing here? How does he want to live his life?

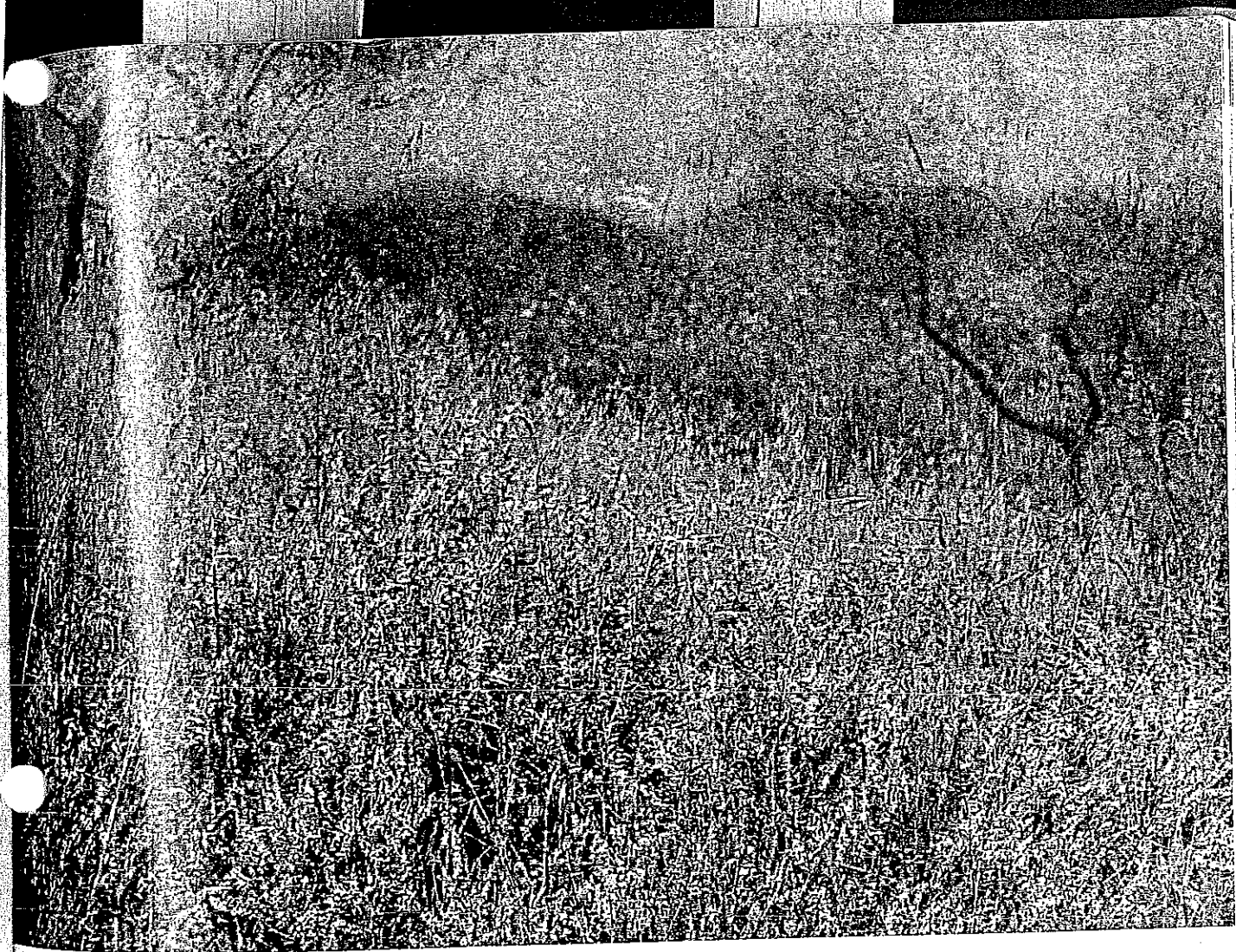


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the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight
amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now.

225 I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that 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
230 more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and
within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his
favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of
a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life,
the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude
will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weak-
235 ness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be
lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations
under them. . . .

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? 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. It is not important that he should mature as soon as an appletree or an oak. Shall he turn his spring into summer? If the condition of things which we were made for is not yet, what were any reality which we can substitute? We will not be shipwrecked on a vain reality. Shall we with pains erect a heaven of blue glass over ourselves, though when it is done we shall be sure to gaze still at the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not? . . .

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However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace. The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. May be they are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable. Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do not want society. If I were confined to a corner of a garret all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts about me. The philosopher said: "From an army of three divisions one can take away its general, and put it in disorder; from the man the most abject and vulgar one cannot take away his thought." Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to many influences to be played on; it is all dissipation. Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights. The shadows of poverty and meanness gather around us, "and lo! creation widens to our view." We are often reminded that if there were bestowed on us

239-242 This is one of the most famous passages in Thoreau's writings. The "different drummer" evolved from one of his journal entries describing an 1839 river voyage when he had fallen asleep to the sound of someone's beating a drum "alone in the silence and the dark." The phrase "marching to the beat of a different drummer" became popular in the nonconformist 1960s. What does it mean to hear a different drummer?

255 almshouse: poorhouse.

255-260 What similarities between poverty and wealth does Thoreau find? What benefits of poverty does Thoreau see?

WORDS
TO
KNOW

misgiving (mī's-gīv'īng) *n.* a feeling of doubt, mistrust, or uncertainty
disreputable (dīs-rēp'yə-tə-bəl) *adj.* lacking respectability of character or behavior
abject (äb'jēkt') *adj.* low; contemptible; wretched
vulgar (vül'gər) *adj.* coarse; common
dissipation (dīs'ə-pā'shən) *n.* a reckless waste of resources; wastefulness



the wealth of Croesus, our aims must still be the same, and our means essentially the same. Moreover, if you are restricted in your range by poverty, if you cannot buy books and newspapers, for instance, you are but confined to the most significant and vital experiences; you are compelled to deal with the material which yields the

most sugar and the most starch. It is life near the bone where it is sweetest. You are defended from being a trifler. No man loses ever on a lower level by magnanimity on a higher. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul. . . .

The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this may be the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats. It was not always dry land where we dwell. I see far inland the banks which the stream anciently washed, before science began to record its freshets. Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts,—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this? Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of wood-
enness in the dead dry life of society, deposited at first in the alburnum of the green and living tree, which has been gradually converted into the semblance of its well-seasoned tomb,—heard perchance gnawing out now for years by the astonished family of man, as they sat round the festive board,—may unexpectedly come forth from amidst society's most trivial and handselled furniture, to enjoy its perfect summer life at last!

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. ❖

279 Croesus (krē'sēs): a king of Lydia (now part of Turkey) in the sixth century B.C. who became legendary for his great wealth.

299-317 What is the message of this famous parable of the "strong and beautiful bug"?

312 alburnum (äl-būr'nēm): the part of a tree's trunk through which sap flows.

316 handselled: cheap; discounted; bought from a traveling salesman.

318 John or Jonathan: the common man. Thoreau's use of familiar given names here is similar to that in the expression "every Tom, Dick, and Harry."

WORDS
TO
KNOW
magnanimity (mäg'nē-nīm'Y-tē) *n.* generosity

1. How is *Walden* an expression of the transcendentalist vision? _____

2. Walden Pond was only mile and a half away from the center of town. Would Thoreau's story be different if he went somewhere really "wild," without a sign of civilization in sight? Why or why not?

3. How do modern conveniences and gadgets influence our culture? After reading Thoreau, are we now eager to give them up?

4. Thoreau talks about "living deliberately" he says "I want to live deep and suck the marrow of life." What do you think he means?

5. Thoreau doesn't really give us an explanation for why he leaves Walden Pond. Do you have any educated guesses? Also, do you think he made the right choice? .

6. Find three examples of metaphor for the text.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

7. Find three examples of similes from the text.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____
