

---

# Transcendentalism

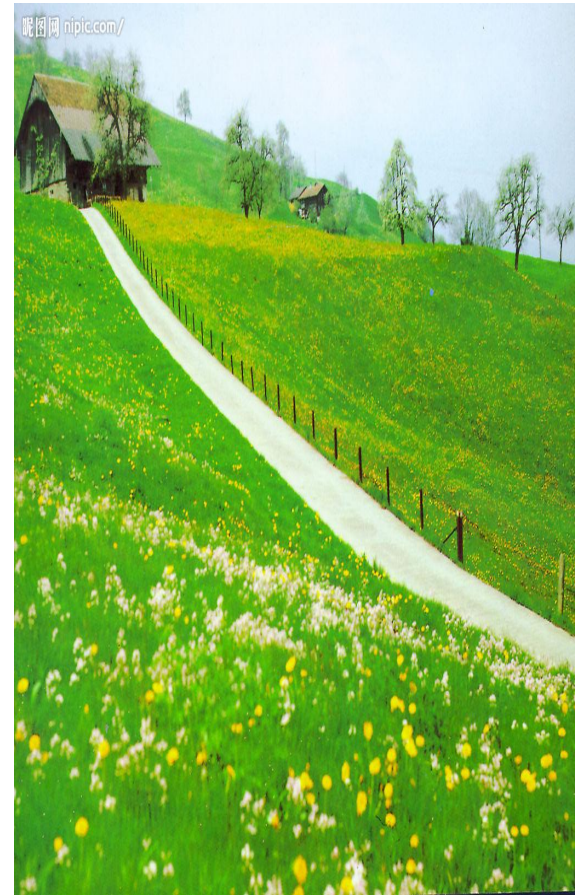
## Ralph Waldo Emerson & Henry David Thoreau



- Transcendentalism (※※)
- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Introduction to *Nature*
- Analysis of *Chapter One*
- Henry David Thoreau
- *An Analysis of Walden*

# Transcendentalism

- flourished in New England from 1830s to the Civil War.
- resource: German idealistic philosophy, neo-Platonism, Oriental mysticism and American native puritan tradition.
- **the summit of American Romanticism.** It marked the maturity of American romanticism and the first renaissance in the American literary history.
- representatives: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau.



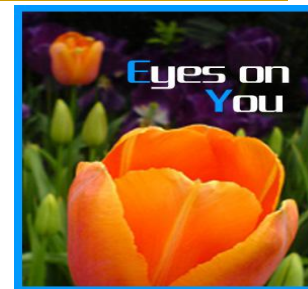
# Major Features

- First, the Transcendentalists placed **emphasis on spirit, or the Oversoul**, as the most important thing in the universe.
- The Oversoul was an all-prevailing power for goodness **omnipresent**(无处不在的) and **omnipotent**(全能的, 无所不能的), from which all things came and of which all were a part. It existed in nature and man alike. The individual soul of man could go beyond the physical limits of the body, emerge himself with nature, and share the **omniscience** (全知) of the Oversoul.



- Secondly, Transcendentalists stressed the importance of the individual. To them, the individual was the most important element of society. The possibilities for man to develop and improve himself are infinite.
- Thirdly, the Transcendentalists offered a fresh perception of nature as symbol of the spirit. To them, nature was not purely matter. It was alive, filled with God's overwhelming presence, on the human mind. The physical world was a symbol of the spiritual and all things in nature tended to be symbolic.

# 超验主义



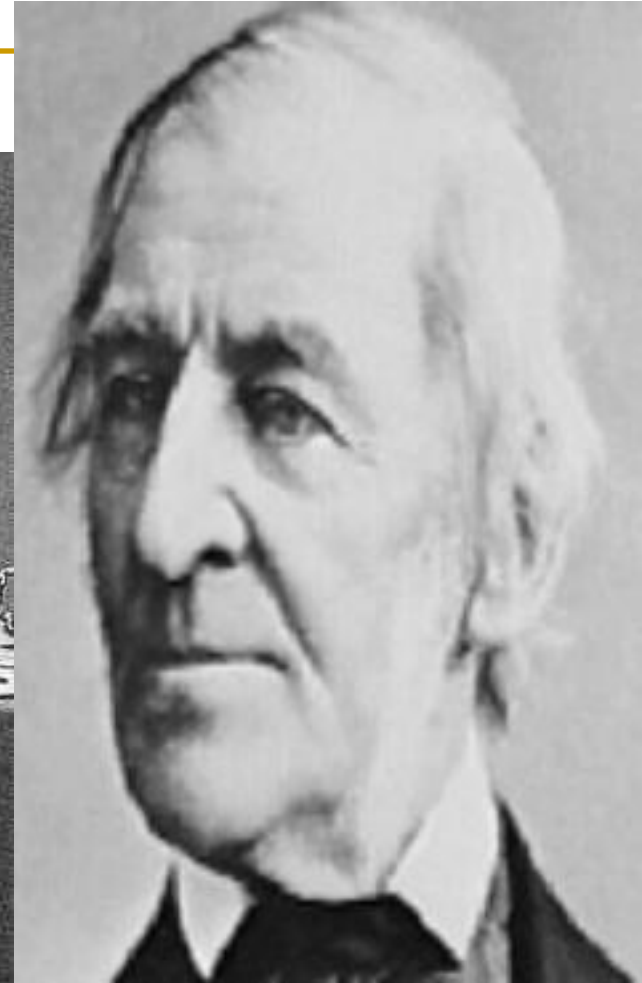
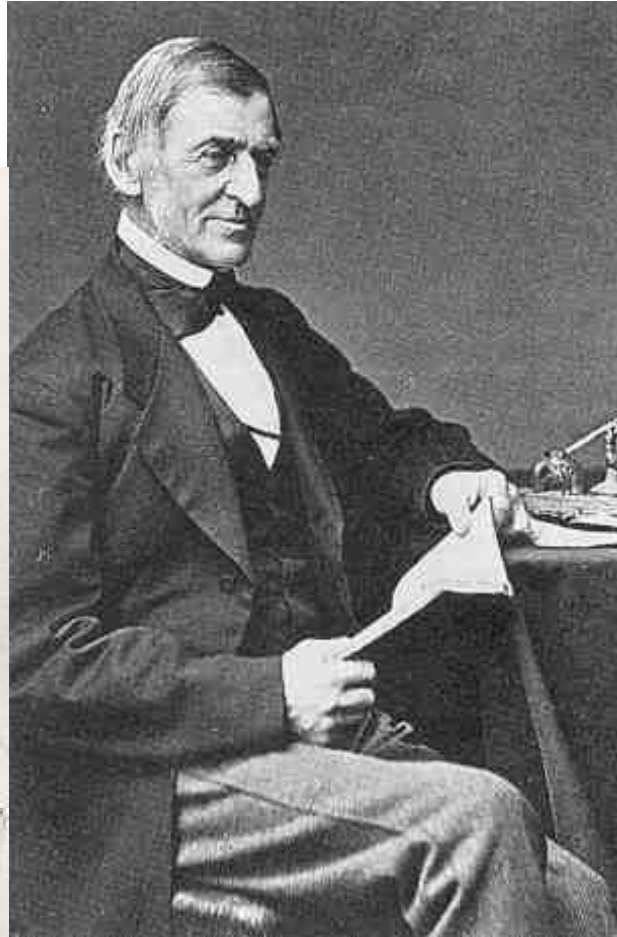
■ 超验主义的主要思想观点有三。

■ 首先，超验主义者强调精神，或超灵，认为这是宇宙至为重要的存在因素。超灵是一种无所不容、无所不在、扬善抑恶的力量，是万物之本、万物之所属，它存在于人和自然界内。

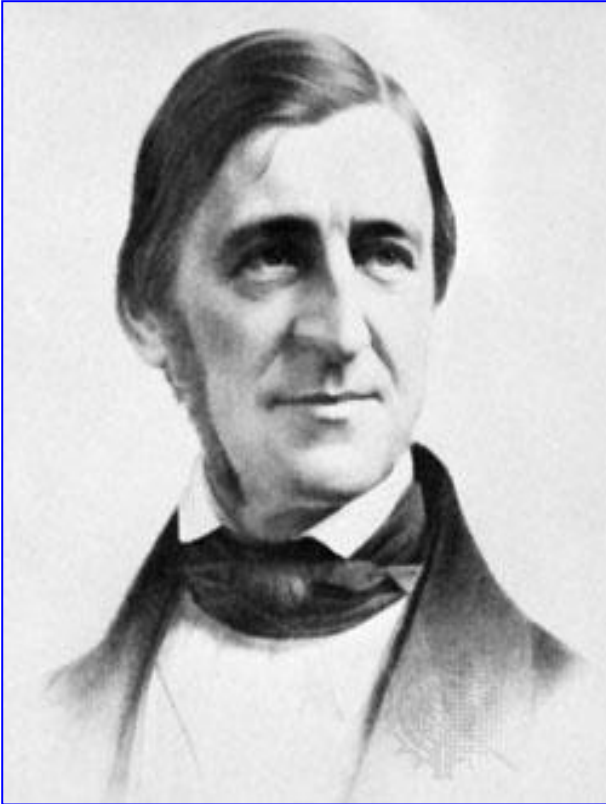
■ 其二，超验主义者强调个人的重要性。他们认为个人是社会的最重要的组成部分，社会的革新只能通过个人的修养和完善才能实现。因此人的首要责任就是自我完善，而不是刻意追求金玉富贵。理想的人是依靠自己的人。

■ 其三，超验主义者以全新的目光看待自然，认为自然界是超灵或上帝的象征。在他们看来，自然界不只是物质而已。它有生命，上帝的精神充溢其中，它是超灵的外衣。因此，它对人的思想具有一种健康的滋补作用。超验主义主张回归自然，接受它的影响，以在精神上成为完人。这种观点的自然内涵是，自然界万物具象征意义，外部世界是精神世界的体现。

# Ralph Waldo Emerson



# Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)



- His life
- Major works
- Emerson's Philosophy and Stylistic Feature
- Emerson's Influence
- *Nature*

# His Life

- 1) born in a clergyman's family in New England
- 2) graduated from Harvard
- 3) founded the Transcendentalist Club and published a journal called *The Dial*
- 4) traveled and gave lectures; quite influential
- 5) died on April 27, 1882, buried in *Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts.*



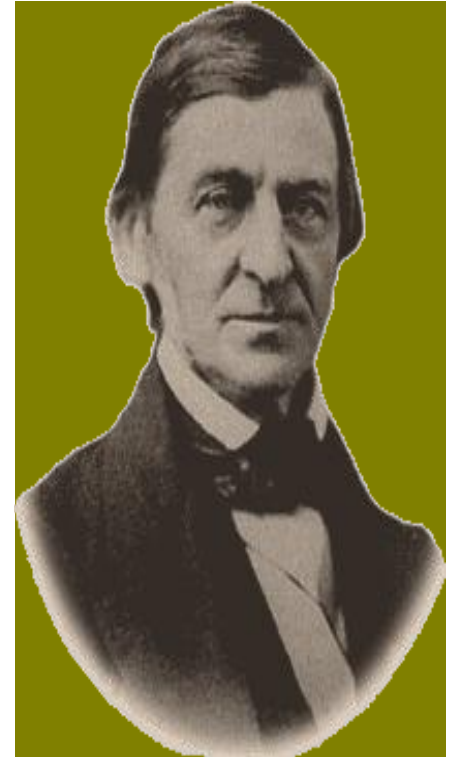
# Major works

- 1) *Nature*—the Bible of New England Transcendentalism.  
—a book which declared the birth of Transcendentalism
- 2) *The American Scholar*—America's Declaration of Intellectual Independence
- 3) *Self-reliance*—the importance of cultivating oneself



# Emerson's Philosophy

- 1. He firmly believes in the transcendence of the Oversoul.
- 2. He advocates "the infinitude of man" .
- 3. To Emerson, nature was emblematic of God.
- 4. He sees the world as phenomenal, and emphasizes the need for idealism, for idealism sees the world in God.



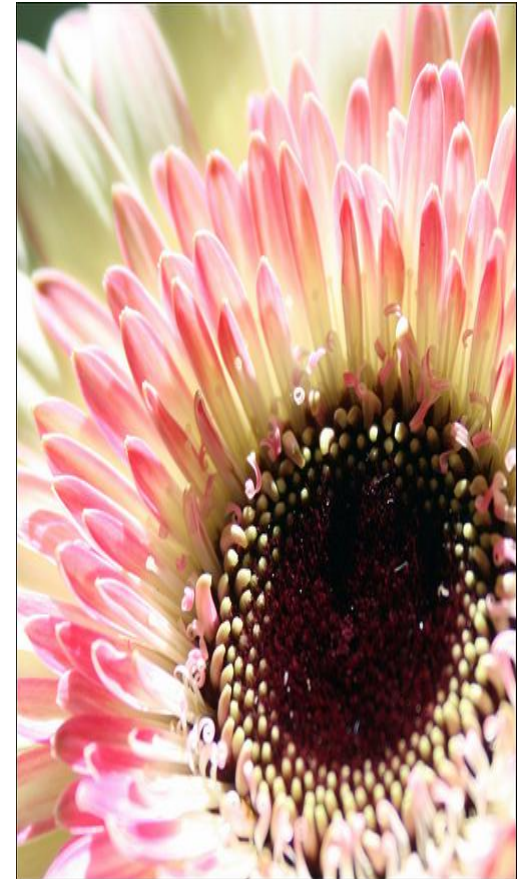
# The Maxims of Emerson



- There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion... Trust thyself, every heart vibrates to the iron string. (*Self-reliance*)
- Be yourself; no base imitator of another, but your best self. There is something which you can do better than another. Listen to the inward voice and bravely obey that. Do the things at which you are great, not what you were never made for.
- To be great is to be misunderstood.

# Emerson's Stylistic Features

- **Epigrammatic** in expression of ideas
- Rich in comparison, especially **metaphor**
- Sometimes incoherent, not well organized.



# Emerson's Influence on American Literature and Culture

- His call for an independent culture played a very important part in the intellectual history of the nation.
- He called on American writers to write about America in a way peculiarly American.
- Emerson's importance in the intellectual history of America lies in the fact that he embodied a new nation's desire and struggle to assert its own identity in its formative period.



# Nature

- *Nature* (1836)— "gospel" of American Transcendentalism.
- — put forth the foundation of transcendentalism, a belief system that espouses a non-traditional vision of nature.
- Emerson is one of the first writers to develop a literary style and vision that is uniquely American, rather than following in the footsteps of Longfellow and others who were strongly influenced by their British cultural heritage.
- *Nature* is the first significant work to establish this new way of looking at America and its raw, natural environment.



# Contents

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Nature
- ◆ Commodity
- ◆ Beauty
- ◆ Language
- ◆ Discipline
- ◆ Idealism
- ◆ Spirit
- ◆ Prospects



# Topics for Presentation

- What is Emerson's idea about the relationship between man and nature?
- According to Emerson, what is the distinction between adult and children?





"Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed in the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God."

(Emerson, Nature, 1836)



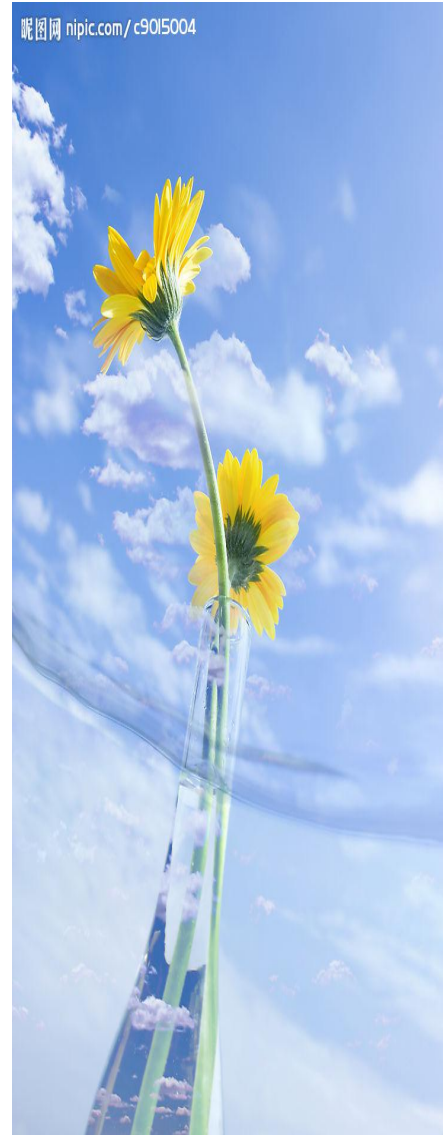


# Analysis of Chapter One

- 1) To have a direct relation with nature, with God's divine creation, **simply go out and look at the stars**. When you approach nature, you'll not be alone.
- 2) **The mind must be open to the appearances of nature** in order to achieve true wisdom.
- 3) **The mind that is truly open to nature's own truth is poetic**. There is a difference between the poet and the farmer or a wood-cutter. The farmer sees the part; the poet sees the whole.



- 4) Because most of us look at nature only with our own desires in mind, we do not really see nature.
- "The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other."
- 5) There is a relation of correspondence or analogy between human being and all natural beings: for instance, there is a spiritual relation between people and plants. Nature and spirit mirror one another.
- 6) What is essential is to be in harmony with nature."
- Nature always wears the colors of the spirit." We project our emotions into nature, and nature reflects them back to us. Nature is a mirror of the moral state of the soul.



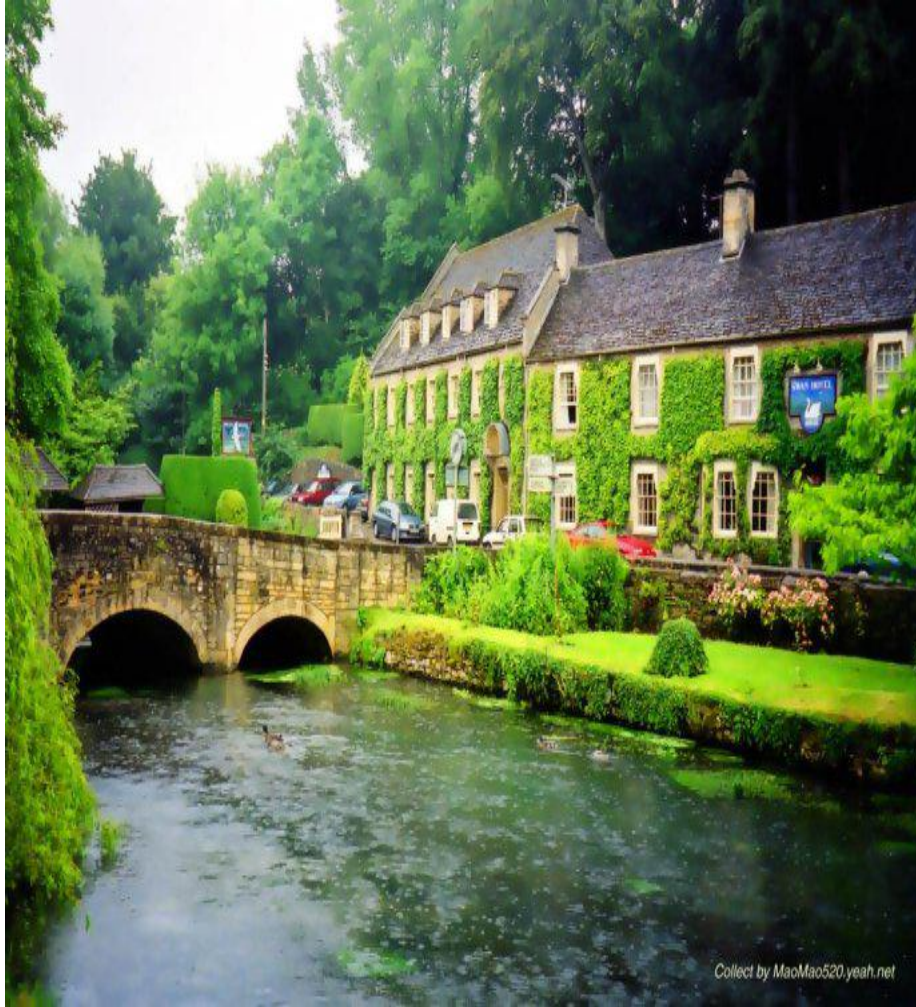
# Discussion

How does the selection bear out Emerson's transcendentalist ideas?

Among Emerson's philosophical sources is the oriental idea holding the organic unity of man and nature. Try to illustrate the point.



# Assignment



- 1. Had Thoreau ever bought a farm? Why did he enjoy the act of buying?
- 2. Where indeed did Thoreau live, both at a physical level and at a spiritual level?

# Henry David Thoreau

## (1817—1862)

---

American essayist

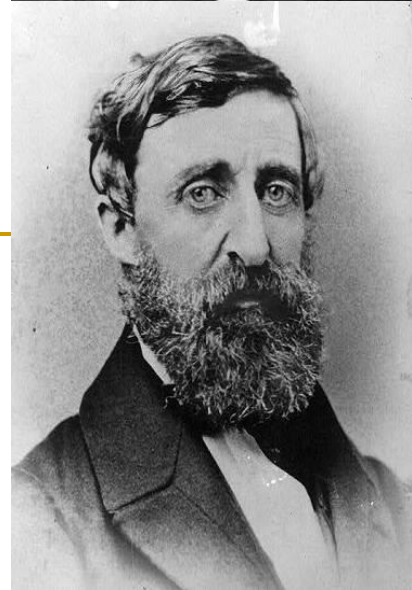
Poet

---

Naturalist

Philosopher

Transcendentalist



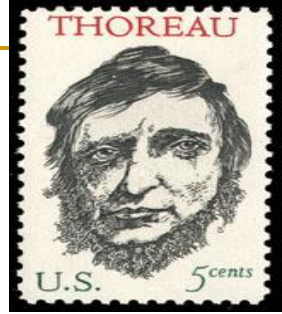


That man is the richest whose pleasure are the cheapest.

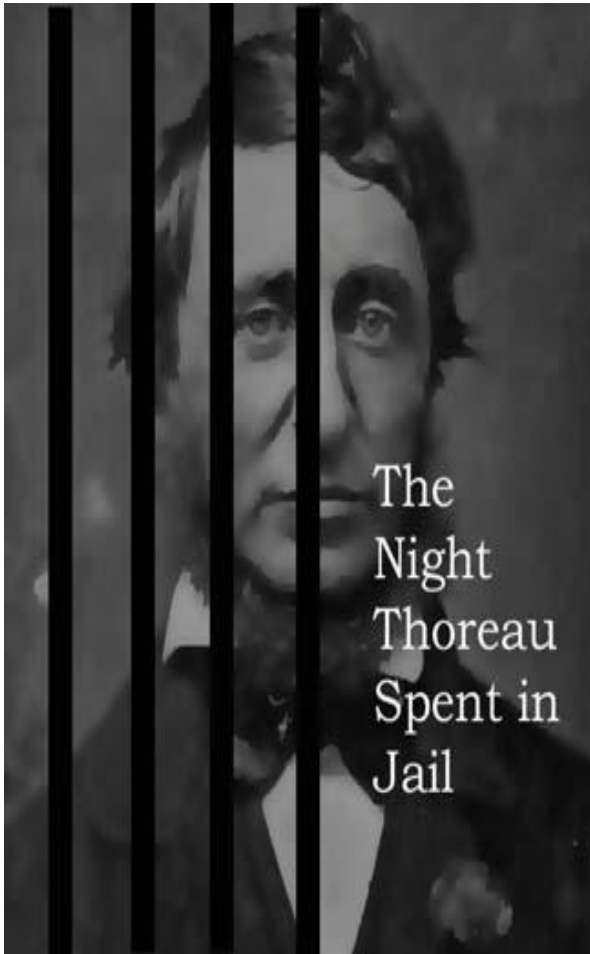
—Henry David Thoreau

The lesson he taught himself, and which he tried to teach others, was summed in the one word "**simplify**" (simplify the outward circumstances of your life, simplify your needs and your ambitions, learn to delight in the simple pleasures which the world of nature affords.) And unlike most who ~~advocate such attitudes, he put them into practice.~~

# Biographical Introduction



- a. Born in Concord in 1817, graduated from Harvard University in 1837.
- b. During his stay with Emerson, Thoreau and his brother John both found, or thought themselves, in love with Ellen after they paid a visit to her in the summer of 1840. Each, without telling the other, proposed marriage. Ellen was disposed to accept Henry, but yielded to the objections of her father.
- c. In 1845, he built a cabin on some land belonging to Emerson by Walden Pond and moved in to live a very simple manner for a little over two years, which gave birth to a great transcendentalist work *Walden* (1854).



- Active in social life and had a strong sense of justice. He once refused to pay a poll-tax of 2 dollars because he felt the tax was unfair, and thus he was jailed. And later he wrote an essay named "**Civil Disobedience** " (1849) which advocated passive resistance to unjust laws and influenced Gandhi in India.

"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.  
THOREAU •

---

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.

# Walden

- **author** · Henry David Thoreau
- **type of work** · Essay
- **genre** · Autobiography; moral philosophy; natural history; social criticism
- **time and place written** · 1845-1854, Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts
- **date of first publication** · 1854
- **narrator** · Henry David Thoreau
- **Walden**: description of his life near the pond called Walden belonging to Emerson. The author lived there for nearly two years with only an axe at the beginning. This book was a failure in his own time but became very popular in the 20th century.



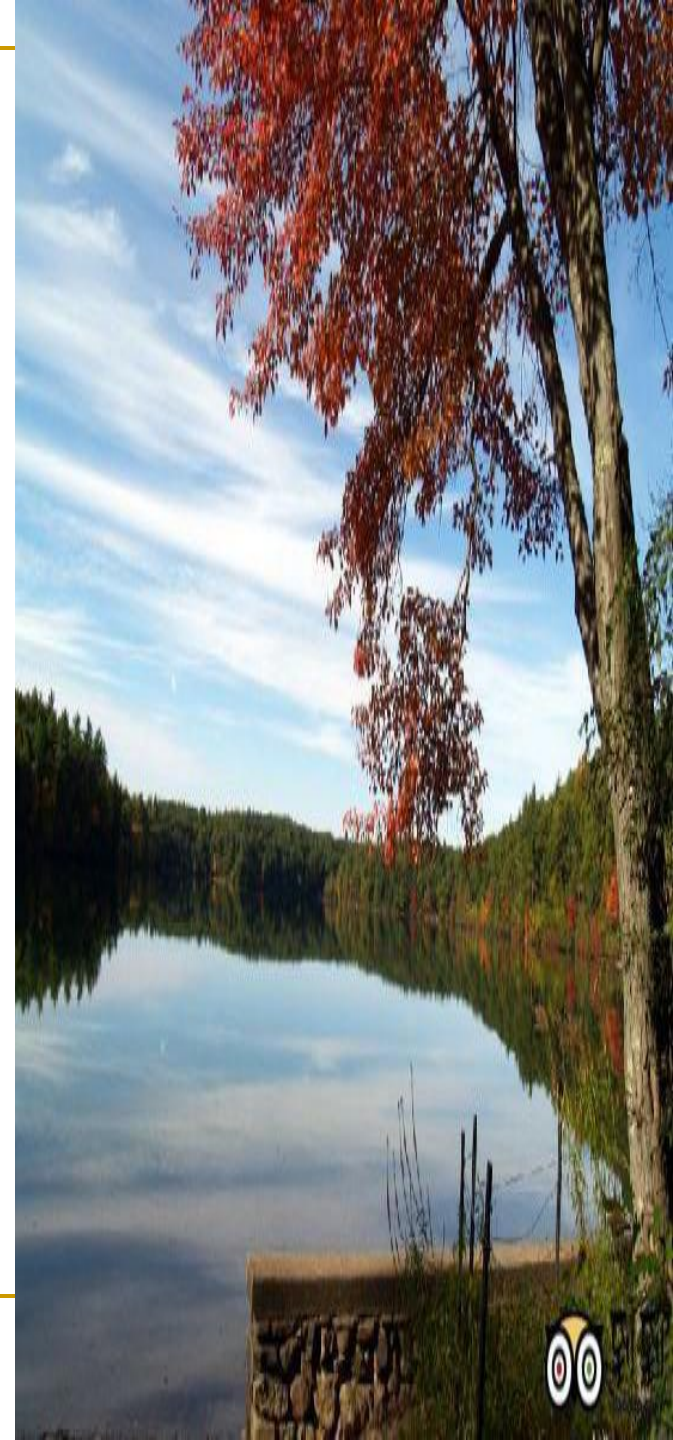
AREYOUHERE.COM

- *Walden* presented Thoreau's unusual interest in nature and showed his individualism which inherited from American Puritanism. The book described the author's extremely simple life and regeneration he experienced when he lived near the Walden pond where he put Emerson's Transcendental doctrines into practice in the actual life.

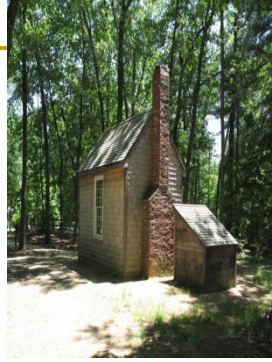


## *Walden*

- It came out of Thoreau's two-year experiment at Walden Pond. It stresses the importance of thought over material circumstance. He believed that there was the possibility for and importance of change in one's spiritual life which is in harmony with nature.



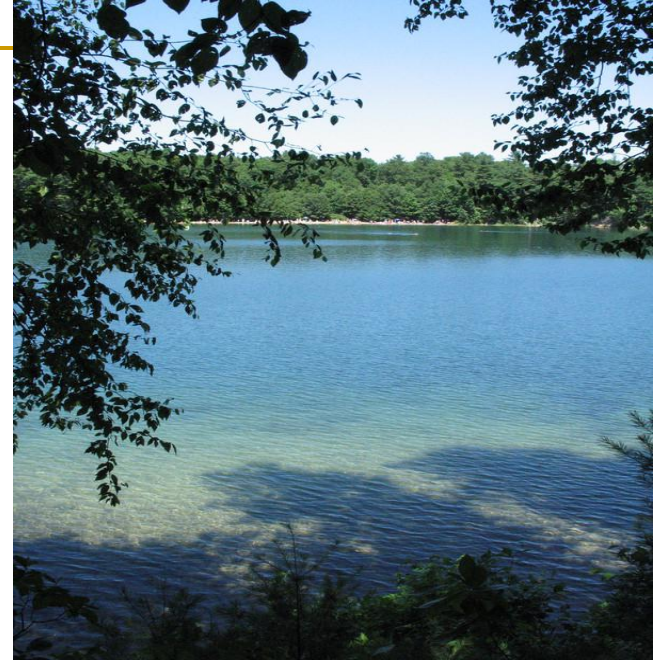
# Contents



- 1. Economy
- 2. Where I Lived, and What I Lived For
- 3. Reading
- 4. Sounds
- 5. Solitude
- 6. Visitors
- 7. The Bean-Field
- 8. The Village



- 9. The Ponds
- 10. Baker Farm
- 11. Higher Laws
- 12. Brute Neighbors
- 13. House-Warming
- 14. Former Inhabitants and Winter Visitors
- 15. Winter Animals
- 16. The Pond in Winter
- 17. Spring
- 18. Conclusion



# Topics for Presentation

- 1. Had Thoreau ever bought a farm? Why did he enjoy the act of buying? (梭罗曾经买农场吗? 为什么他喜欢购买的过程?)
- 2. Where indeed did Thoreau live, both at a physical level and at a spiritual level? (从物质层面和精神层面来谈梭罗住在哪里?)



---

## Where I Lived, and What I Lived For

After playing with the idea of buying a farm, Thoreau describes his cabin's location. Then he explains that he took up his abode at Walden Woods so as 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."

---

# Thoreau's Ideas Embodied in His *Walden*

- 1. He saw nature as a genuine restorative healthy influence on man's spiritual well-being, and regarded it as a symbol of spirit.
- He firmly believes that "nature objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types which express our thoughts and feelings." He was seen lost in contemplation of the world around.
- So *Walden* is a faithful record of his reflections when he was in solitary communion with nature, an eloquent indication that he not only embraced Emerson's Transcendentalist philosophy but went even further to illustrate the pantheistical quality of nature.

- 2. Thoreau has faith in the inner virtue and inward, spiritual grace of man.

- He holds that the most important thing for men to do with their lives is to be self-sufficient and strive to achieve personal spiritual perfection. So he has been regarded as a prophet of individualism in American literature.

- 3. Thoreau was very critical of modern civilization. It was, in his opinion, degrading and enslaving man. As he saw it, modern civilized life had dehumanized man and placed him in a spiritual quandary.



- 4. In his opinion, spiritual richness is real wealth.
- 5. *Walden* exhibits Thoreau's calm trust in the future and his ardent belief in a new generation of men.
- 这本书反映出人与自然的神性。他不仅是爱默生的忠实信徒，他是一个泛神主义者——自然界的万物都具有神性。他坚定地认为自然界中的万物都是具有象征意义的，它能表达出我们的思想和感情。



# Walden, or Life in the Woods

✧ 瓦尔登湖 ✧

Henry David Thoreau 亨利·戴维·梭罗



一直在寻找他，不经意撞入眼帘时却是如此陌生——居然无法安静下来，也许现在真的不能进入他的灵魂深处，然而，肯定会有一天，静静地、静静地……

——青年作家 落思

每日的繁忙生活让我们忘记了思考的重要性，夜晚，在台灯下面，静静地读《瓦尔登湖》这本静静的书，一切的喧嚣都变成了过眼云烟。心中只有美丽、纯洁……

——环境学家 郭慧

喧嚣的世界，人们疲惫奔波于生活。不经意地，看到了这一泓清澈，终于明白——生命的真谛在这里，享受一片安静，咀嚼自然美丽！

——青年作家 方舟

《瓦尔登湖》是本静静的书，极静极静的书，并不是热热闹闹的书。它是一本寂寞的书，一本孤独的书。它只是一本一个人的书；如果你的心没有安静下来，恐怕你很难进入到这本书里去。——徐迟 《〈瓦尔登湖〉译本序》



# WALDEN POND

*Photographs by Bonnie McGrath*

*Reflections by Henry David Thoreau*

《瓦尔登湖》至少有五种读法：

- 1. 作为一部自然的书籍；
- 2. 作为一部自力更生、简单生活的书；
- 3. 作为批评现代生活的一部讽刺作品；
- 4. 作为一部文学名著；
- 5. 作为一本神圣的书。

——哈丁

# 内容提要

- 选篇摘自《沃尔登》中的第二篇文章“我生活的地方；我为何生活”。为了实践他的超验主义哲学，梭罗曾在马萨诸塞州康科德附近的沃尔登湖畔自建木屋，靠采集野菜、野果，自种豆类而维持生活长达两年之久。他在沃尔登湖畔的生活和思考使他得以完成两部最重要的著作：《在康科德与梅里马克河上一周》（A week on the Concord and Merrimack River, 1849）和《沃尔登》（Walden, 1854）。《沃尔登》由18篇文章组成，记录了他所观察到的自然以及他建造木屋、耕种土地、招待朋友等生活情况。
- 书中讴歌了人类与自然的和谐生活，倡导个人主义、自力更生、物质节俭。他试图将身体的物质需要缩小到最低限度，以便在读书、思考、观察自然与自我当中获得更大的精神财富和自由。他也呼吁人们过最简朴的生活，以便节约时间和精力来“过深层次的生活，吮吸出生活的精髓”。

他努力发掘美国自然环境在人类教养、心灵塑造等方面的潜能，强调所有人都应该有充分的自由来选择独一无二的生活方式，将自己的生活做成诗、当作艺术。他向人们展示出闲暇、沉思、与大自然和谐共处等的种种益处，为美国自然作家的写作开了先河。在《沃尔登》的数篇文章中，梭罗对工作和闲暇的意义进行了颇有独创性的思考，并描述了自己尽可能简朴地、自给自足地生活方面所做的实验，强调这项简朴生活的试验绝不是无所事事地与世隔绝。在这些文章中，梭罗描述了林中生活的细节：他与各种各样的小动物的接触；不同季节中树木与水的不同声音、气味和颜色；大风吹动电报线以及远方的火车汽笛所奏出的旋律等。梭罗在沃尔登湖畔日复一日的切身经历使该书有极大的真实感，而文章清晰、直截了当，但又不失文雅的风格，使《沃尔登》达到了文学经典作品的水平。

# 赏析

■ 选篇第一部分描述了梭罗对于家园的总体态度和一般寻求，主要刻画了寻找家园的心理过程和精神满足；第二部分则具体描述梭罗在沃尔登湖畔的家园，以及这一家园与大自然的融合。

■ 在第一部分，梭罗仔细勘察了许多农场；他用“survey”一词来暗指他本人土地测量员的身份（surveyor），说自己是所有勘察测量过的土地的君王。梭罗在想象中买下了无数农场，他用商业语言描述了购买农场的过程，但金钱交换实际上并未发生，发生的只是精神财富的增加。他没有买下农场，但保留了景色；就像诗人一样，用韵律这一隐形的篱笆，圈住了农场，得到了田园的精华。在以上描述中，梭罗用日常生活的语言，发掘出了深层的意义。



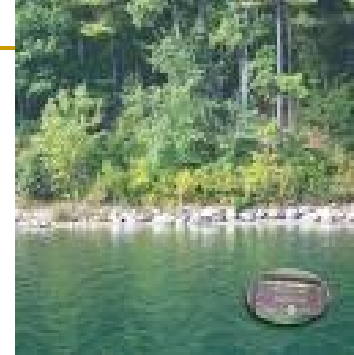


- 他以“自然诗人”的敏感细腻，改变了通常以人为中心的思维模式，将大自然放到了最重要的地位。他喜欢破旧的房屋、倒塌的栅栏，因为这使他远离以前的房客，而更接近自然；他喜爱空心的树木，因为这说明他的邻居将是啃啮树木的兔子。他用一个双关词“committed”告诉人们，要过自由、无拘无束“uncommitted”的生活。因为贪婪而受到农场的束缚、而过份投入到农场的事务，就无异于关进牢笼。



- 在选篇的第二部分，梭罗具体描述了他自己在沃尔登湖畔建立的家园。他所建造的木屋只能遮雨，不能挡风。但在他看来，穿堂而过的风声恰恰是大地音乐的天国乐章，是未被打断的创世纪的诗篇。他与鸟为邻，但并非像一般人一样，将鸟关在笼子里；恰恰相反，他将“关自己的笼子”放在离鸟近的地方。他的这一实践和描述大大影响了现代的自然保护主义者：在现代的野生公园里，野生动物可以四处游荡，而游人则只能在笼子里观赏。梭罗的情感与大自然完全交融，他因此而生活在最吸引他的地方和时代：他的家坐落在宇宙中一个隐秘、常新、未受亵渎的角落。

# Topics for Discussion



1. How do you understand "I am monarch of all I survey, My right there is none to dispute."?
2. Can you discern some modernistic significance in this essay?

(ecological balance, environmental protection, a prophet who foresees the problems of environment)

3. Compare Thoreau's ideas with Chinese classical philosophical ideas, can you find out some similarities?

(Chuang Tzu 庄子/ 天人合一，人与自然和谐/陶渊明)

林雨堂先生在《论生活的重要性》中写道：“就其整个人生观来说，梭罗在美国作家中最具中国情趣。作为中国人，我感觉与梭罗心心相通。我可以将梭罗的文字译成中文，把它们当作中国诗人的诗作向国人展示。没有人会产生怀疑。”比较文学的视野



■ 梭罗的创作表现出对于声音、意象、深层意义、词的细微差别的高度敏感。他的写作风格乍看起来平铺直叙、直截了当，但实际上，各种巧妙的比喻、词源上的双关语、典故的运用、对传统谚语的灵活运用等使通常的意义发生新的变化或者扭曲，使读者不得不作品进行重新思考、重新评价。例如在以上选篇中，他将山峰比喻为天国造币厂的纯蓝色（true-blue，又有不退色的蓝色或忠诚的含义）的硬币，将天国、自然与人间联系起来。他将自己的比喻为将大地和天空扛在肩上的阿特拉斯，但他所扛起的却是精神的大地和天空。他说诸神之家奥林波斯只不过是无处不在的大地的外表，这既赋予世上万物以灵气，又将诸神融入了自然与人间。

## 《归园田居》

少无适俗韵，性本爱丘山。  
误落尘网中，一去三十年。  
羁鸟恋旧林，池鱼思故渊。  
开荒南野际，守拙归田园。  
方宅十余亩，草屋八九间。  
榆柳荫后檐，桃李罗堂前。  
暧暧远人村，依依墟里烟。  
狗吠深巷中，鸡鸣桑树颠。  
户庭无尘杂，虚室有余闲。  
久在樊笼里，复得返自然。



# Group Discussion

- What are the similarities and differences of 《瓦尔登湖》 and 《归园田居》
- What is the relationship between man and nature? 人与自然的关系如何?
- How should we deal with the environmental problems now as a college student? (作为大学生, 我们应该如何应对现在的环境问题?)

GREEN

绿色生活，低碳出行

出行  
绿色



中宣部宣教局 中国文明网



# Assignment



- Symbolic meanings of "A" in *The Scarlet Letter*.

