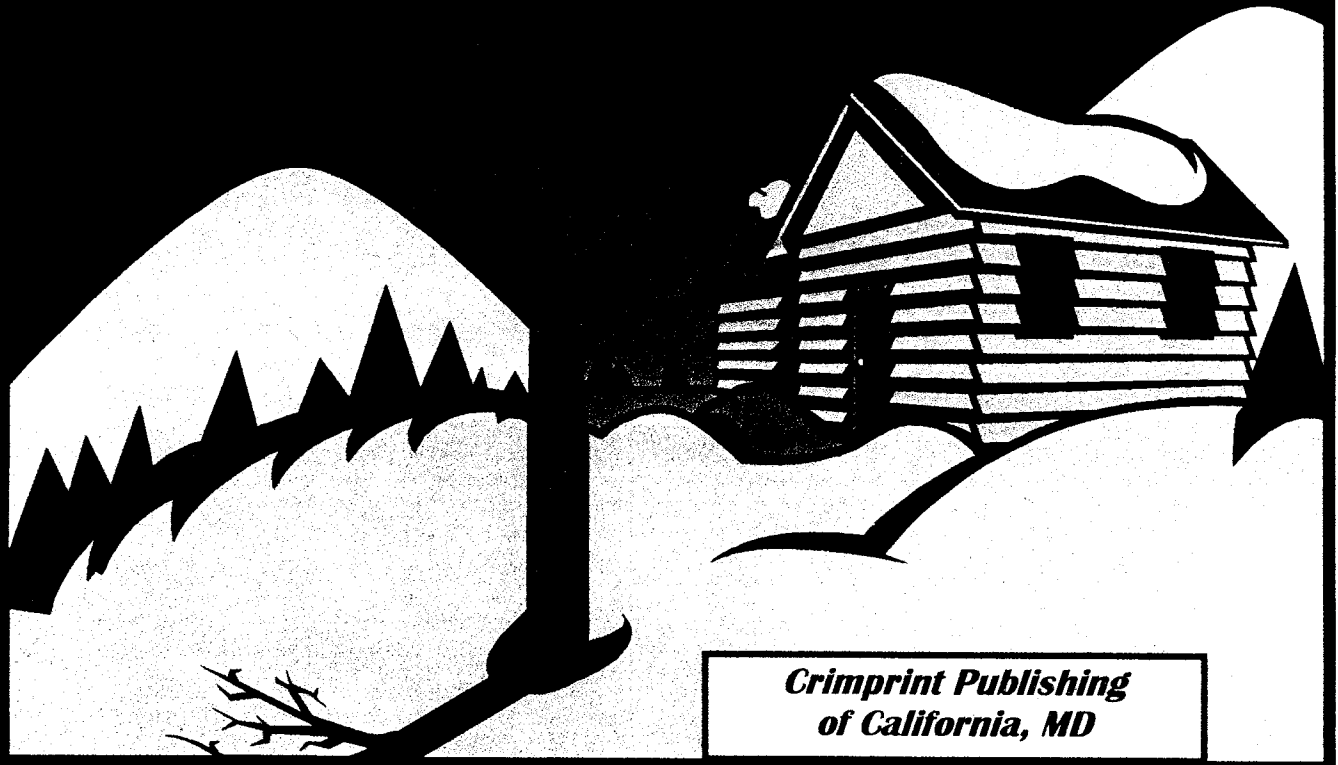


A Teachers' Guide to Transcendentalism

by Michael F. Crim
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***Crimprint Publishing
of California, MD***

*This First Edition
of
A Teacher's Guide
to
Transcendentalism
Is Inscribed
to
The Thoreau Institute*

Michael F. Linn, 1997

“Summer at Laurel Hill”

“In the woods is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the wood, we return to reason and faith. There I feel nothing can befall me in life,... which nature cannot repair.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson,

Nature



*Original Artwork by
Joanna Auron, 1996*

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to
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by
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*Dedicated
to Carl Bode,
who was my teacher,
and Walter Harding,
who founded the Thoreau Society*

Table of Contents



Why This Guide?

How to Use This Guide

Part One: Transcendentalism and the Transcendentalists

What is Transcendentalism?

Transcendentalism Is...

Transcendentalism Factsheet

Concord, Massachusetts: The Epicenter

Concord in American History

Concord in the Time of the Transcendentalists

Concord Today

Theory and Application: Emerson and Thoreau

Emerson and Thoreau at a Glance

The Essential Emerson and Thoreau

Emerson in Depth

Thoreau in Depth

Civil Disobedience

A. Bronson Alcott

Margaret Fuller

George Ripley and Brook Farm

Convers Francis

Frederic Henry Hedge

Questionings, by Frederic Henry Hedge (with discussion questions)

Theodore Parker

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody

Jones Very

Other Important Transcendentalists:

Orestes A. Brownson

William Ellery Channing

James Freeman Clarke

Creative Outlets:

The Transcendental Club

The *Dial*

Table of Contents, Page 2

Part Two: Teaching Transcendentalism

Suggested Lessons and Units of Study

- Teaching Transcendentalism to Social Studies Students
- Teaching Transcendentalism to English 11 Standard Students
- Teaching Transcendentalism to English 11 CM College Bound
- Research Paper for English 11CM
- Assignment Sheet
- Outline Form
- Gradesheet

Student Handouts

- Transcendentalism Notes for Standard Students
- Transcendentalism Quiz for Standard Students
- The Cosmopolitans and World View
- Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism (with study questions and essay topics)

The Student's Guide to Transcendentalism

- What is Transcendentalism?
- Transcendentalism Is,,,
- Transcendentalism Factsheet
- The Essential Emerson and Thoreau
- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Poems by Emerson (with study questions)
- Henry David Thoreau
- The Inward Morning*, by Henry David Thoreau (study questions)
- Civil Disobedience
- Margaret Fuller
- A. Bronson Alcott
- Theodore Parker
- Elizabeth Palmer Peabody

Part Three: Sources and Resources

Resources for Teachers

- Associations
- Teaching Aids in Print
- Cybersources
- Recommended Readings for Teachers
- Works Cited



Why This Guide?

English language arts teachers and social studies teachers know who Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are and have read at least some excerpts from their books and essays. Many teachers have at least a passing knowledge of the philosophy of Transcendentalism which underlies the writings of these men. Unfortunately, reading a few excerpts and a surface familiarity with a complex philosophy are not adequate foundations for teaching Transcendentalism. The purpose of this guide is to give both English and social studies teachers, as well as any other teacher who has an interest in sharing this important topic with his or her students, the basic information they would need to present lessons and units of study on Transcendentalism with some coherence and depth.

But why should Transcendentalism be taught at all? There were never very many true Transcendentalists, and the movement, which became cohesive in the mid-1830's, had pretty much spent itself by the start of the Civil War, and fell out of whatever favor it had after the war was over. Furthermore, it is impossible to discuss Transcendentalism coherently without talking about God and humankind's relationship with the Almighty, and many teachers today are uncomfortable about any mention of God in their classrooms for understandable reasons, no matter what happens to be their private beliefs. Besides, aren't Emerson and Thoreau just two more examples of the "dead white males" who have come to dominate classic American literature? After all, Emerson himself asked, "Why dwell among the dead bones of the past?"

These are good questions, and deserve thoughtful responses. Though the Transcendentalists were few in number and their movement short-lived, from the start they exerted an inordinate influence on American literature and culture. For 40 years, from the mid-1830's to the mid-1870's, Emerson strode the American intellectual stage like a colossus. His words and ideas appealed to the average person as well as the intellectual elite. His influence on the greatest non-fiction prose writer in American history, Henry David Thoreau, was more than substantial. Emerson also affected tremendously the two greatest American poets—Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden, or Life in the Woods* is the pre-eminent non-fiction book in America's bibliography, its beautifully written yet powerful insights increasingly persuasive with each succeeding generation. Thoreau's seminal essay *On Civil Disobedience* is arguably the most important essay written in the last 150 years. It inspired and guided both the Mahatma, Gandhi, and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who taken together led political and social movements that changed for the better the lives of hundreds of millions of people in India and the United States. Furthermore, Thoreau is widely regarded as the patron saint of the environmental movement, and his scientific studies— included in his *Journal*, *The Dispersion of Seeds* and *Wild Fruits*— are growing in stature.

Why This Guide?

Page 2

Attention should also be paid to those who considered Transcendentalism seriously, and then rejected it. These so-called anti-Transcendentalists were inspired, albeit in a negative way, by what they considered to be an overly optimistic and plainly unrealistic view of human nature. Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, the two leading anti-Transcendentalists, were openly derisive of this Idealistic philosophy in some of their most important works, such as Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* and Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Melville, in fact, at one point described Ahab as being "transcendental mad."

There were other Transcendentalists besides Emerson and Thoreau who have had a lasting influence on our American heritage and who should be remembered. Among these are Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, and Theodore Parker.

Bronson Alcott was an innovative and enlightened educator who was far ahead of his time. He believed that children were not merely miniature adults but were developing human beings whose minds and bodies needed to be nurtured. He disdained physical punishment in favor of gentle remonstrance, and his obvious love for his students made them want to behave and work hard at their studies. He sought to educate females as well as males, and African-American children as well as white children. He maintained that children have as much to teach as to be taught. Though his attempts at reform initially met with failure, later in life Alcott found vindication as some of his most important teaching methods became established in America's classrooms.

Margaret Fuller was not only one of the major Transcendentalists, she was an early, ardent and important advocate of women's rights at the very advent of feminism in America. The "Conversations"—symposia for women she conducted in Boston in the 1840's—established that women could more than hold their own in discussions of the great issues of the day. Her book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, is one of the early American feminist manifestos. As a Transcendentalist, she not only edited *The Dial*—for which she is now most remembered—but she also worked closely with both Alcott and Emerson. Much of Fuller can be found in several of Emerson's more important essays.

Theodore Parker was perhaps the most socially committed of the Transcendentalists, a radical reformer who fought to abolish slavery and gain equal rights and suffrage for women. As a Unitarian minister he shocked the religious establishment of Boston with his Transcendental Idealism, but to their dismay refused to resign his ministry and regularly drew hundreds to his sermons. Much of his religious idealism eventually found its way into mainstream Unitarianism. He was an important supporter of John Brown, a member of the secret committee that funded Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. This raid—with Brown's capture and subsequent execution—was one of the catalysts of the Civil War.

It is evident, then, that Transcendentalism is not only a proper, but also a necessary, subject to be taught in America's high schools. The Transcendentalists' contributions to our American heritage have been immense, and teachers who seek to enlighten their students about these moral pathfinders are not "dwelling among dead bones," but are reaching back to grasp the still-living hands of their ideas.

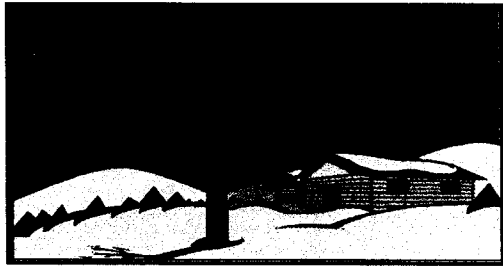
How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to be teacher-friendly, flexible and easy to use. Every page in this guide has been printed on high-quality paper and will reproduce easily on all copiers. It has purposely not been bound, but three-hole punched and loose-leafed for ready accessibility and repeated use. Teachers are encouraged to use any part of this guide that they find appropriate for their teaching of American literature, history, culture and philosophy.

The first two parts—*Transcendentalism and The Transcendentalists* and *Teaching Transcendentalism*—may be used independently or in tandem. Each article in *Transcendentalism and the Transcendentalists* is self-contained and self-numbered and can be used for the teacher's personal reference or shared with the students. Most of the articles about the individual Transcendentalists has on the left-hand side of the first page an *At a Glance* column which gives a quick overview of the person's life, major writings, and achievements. If the teacher desires or the student needs more information, on the right-hand side of the page an *In Depth* feature begins which gives a detailed summary of the person's life and importance. These summaries are often several pages in length. The *At a Glance* columns can be used by high school students of both average and higher-level abilities, while the *In Depth* features are meant to be used by teachers for lesson preparation or by higher-level students. The *In Depth* articles, moreover, have been designed and written so that higher-level students may use them as sources for research papers. Much of the information in these features is *not* commonly found in anthologies or encyclopedias.

Teaching Transcendentalism consists of handouts, study questions, possible student activities, and suggested units of study. Three separate units are provided, one each for average-level (standard) literature students, college-bound literature students, and social studies students. *The Student's Guide to Transcendentalism*, a self-contained booklet, is an important part of this section. It is meant to be used primarily by college-bound literature and social studies students. There are also handouts specifically for average-level students. Most of these handouts can be used independently of any of the other materials in the *Guide* and are geared toward the eleventh grade, although a significant portion of the material can be used at all four high school grade levels. Let it be stipulated that the lessons and units presented here are merely suggested; I do not believe in telling fellow teachers how to teach. It is hoped, however, that English and social studies teachers find some good and helpful approaches to an essential albeit complex part of our curriculum.

The purpose of *Sources and Resources*, the third part of *A Teacher's Guide to Transcendentalism*, is to provide teachers with the names and addresses of organizations and associations which have proven to be helpful in preparing lessons and in gathering resources. Included with the print resources are a number of fascinating and useful on-line sites. An annotated list of recommended readings is also provided, and a complete inventory of the works cited in the *Guide* has been carefully assembled.



Part One:

Transcendentalism

and

The Transcendentalists

"We are limited without, but unlimited within."

What is Transcendentalism?

Transcendentalism is an extremely important element in our American culture. Some of the greatest intellects and writers that America has produced have been Transcendentalists, and their ideas and writings have had a profound influence on the way Americans look at themselves and the world around them. While the roots of Transcendentalism reach all the way back to the Ancient World and stretch from Europe to India, in both its expression and application it is very American.

Transcendentalism holds that the world we perceive with our senses is not all of existence and reality. There is a *transcendent* reality that lies beyond sensual experience. It is in this transcendent reality that the Truth about humanity's place in the universe, humanity's relationship with God, and the nature of God can be revealed. According to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, anything that is transcendent lies outside human experience. If that is the case, how can we connect with transcendent reality and find the Truth?

The Transcendentalists had an answer. They maintained that each individual had an innate ability to transcend, or go beyond, ordinary sensory experience. They called this ability *intuition*. Conscience and morality were also present at birth. The Transcendentalists claimed that everyone experiences intuitive insights, but they are mostly unrecognized or disregarded. The person seeking a deeper understanding of his or her existence should be open to these *transcendental experiences*, and while these experiences cannot be precipitated, they can be anticipated. One way to experience an intuitive insight is to clear the mind of all the petty details of everyday life and concentrate on the significant and the important. One of the best ways to do this is by returning to God's direct creation: Nature. The transcendentalists felt that contemplation and study of Nature would cleanse the individual of the accoutrements of the man-made and enable the person's intuition to make its connection with transcendent reality.

The Transcendentalists believed that God was the Universal Being, or Over-Soul, present throughout Nature and in each individual human being. They maintained that each human being had a "spark of the divine" within, and that all people were connected to each other and Nature through the Over-Soul. As a result, Transcendentalists asserted that each individual was not only equal in the eyes of God, but should also be so in the eyes of humankind; further, each individual was important and had the potential for greatness. It is easy to see how they could readily conclude that slavery was therefore evil, women should not be subservient to men, all forms of labor were dignified and all workers should be treated with dignity, that education was a necessity, and that Nature had to be preserved and cherished.

Philosophical Background

American Transcendentalism is generally agreed to date from the 1836 publication of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*, in which he wrote, "The noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it... Three problems are put by nature to the mind; *What is matter? Whence is it? and Whereto?*" (R. W. Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, The Library of America, page 40) Transcendentalism, then, attempts to define the nature of existence, the nature of God, and the nature of man's relationship with God.

When Emerson asks, *What is matter?* he is in actuality asking about the nature of existence. This question was addressed by Plato (427-347 BC), who asserted that beyond "the common world of sense is an unchangeable world of ideas, which alone gives to the world of sense whatever pale reflection of reality may belong to it. The truly real world...is the world of ideas." (Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, page 92)

Plato's insistence that these ideas, called *Universals* by Russell, and by others *Forms*, are the true reality, and that what we see, hear, feel, and smell with our senses are merely imperfect reflections of that true reality, forms the basis of the theory of *Idealism*, which is one of the roots of Transcendentalism.

The Irish philosopher George Berkeley (1685-1752) said that these "ideas are contained in the mind of God as well as in finite minds; that it is in his mind that the 'things' I perceive exist when I do not perceive them. Our whole knowledge of nature, in fact, is but a knowledge of God's orderly arrangement of ideas..." (T.V. Smith and Marjorie Grene, editors, *Berkeley, Hume, and Kant*, page 4) Berkeley maintained that the ideas we have in our minds are put there by God, that our minds are essentially passive. As a result, we are not capable of having an idealistic knowledge of God, but we do have a *notion* of Him. (Ibid) This assertion helped lay the foundation for the Transcendentalist concept of *intuition*.

Immanuel Kant (1704-1804, Germany) took Berkeley's theory a step further. He agreed that man can only know "that world which his mind, because of its nature, constructs from the sensations received by contact with the outer universe." (S. E. Frost, Jr., *Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers*, Doubleday, page 69) But he insisted that knowledge derived from the senses was not everything. He maintained that mankind also has an *a priori* knowledge; that is, "knowledge that does not come through our senses, but is independent of all sense experience; knowledge belonging to us by the inherent nature and structure of the mind." (Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, Time Inc., page 248)

Kant coined the term *transcendental philosophy*, by which he meant that *a priori* knowledge transcends, or goes beyond, experience, and is the key to understanding the truth about the nature of reality.

Somewhat related to the German Idealism of Kant is the *Scottish Common Sense* of Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), and others, which asserts that "we all possess something called the moral sense or the moral sentiment, which is anchored in the emotional, feeling, sympathetic part of human nature...shared by all people in all times." (Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson, the Mind on Fire*, University of California Press, page 32) Stewart maintained that people were basically the same, and therefore equal. (Ibid, page 33) This moral sense is the individual's guide to determining right from wrong, truth from untruth, and is innate, intuitive, and *a priori*.

Transcendentalism was part of a larger philosophical, social, and literary movement called *Romanticism*. A form of Idealism, and influential in England, Europe, and America, Romanticism placed great emphasis on Nature, the emotions, and the worth of the individual. As with other forms of Idealism, Romanticism maintains that there is a higher reality beyond the reach of our senses. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834, England) said that it was through the *Imagination* that this higher reality could be accessed.

What is Transcendentalism?

Page 3

The Imagination, according to Coleridge, was not “mere fancy,” but the “unifying agent of the mind” that “brings the whole soul of man into activity.” (David Perkins, editor, *English Romantic Writers*, Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., page 393)

To this Idealistic mix of notions concerning the truth of reality and the worth of the individual was added the legacy of *Rationalism*, and its quasi-religious manifestation, *Deism*. Rationalism countered both the Ptolemaic earth-centered view held in place for over a thousand years by the Medieval Church and the Deterministic world view of the Reformation Calvinists. The earth-centered notion of creation was shattered by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), the founder of modern astronomy, and Determinism— which insisted that humankind had no free will and that the destiny of every individual had already been pre-ordained by God— was challenged convincingly by Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who is considered by many the founder of modern philosophy.

Descartes was one of the first to apply inductive reasoning to the study of philosophy, and his famous statement *Cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am.”) placed the Intellect on a par with the Imagination. The Rationalists who followed Descartes would differ as to how the individual received bits of information and transformed them into knowledge that could be applied to everyday life; but they all agreed that the individual played an active, even decisive, role in gathering this knowledge, and had the potential to discern absolute Truth.

All of these ideas about the nature of reality, of God, and mankind’s relationship with God, from Plato to Descartes and Coleridge, were synthesized by Emerson. But then he added to the world view he was developing basic Hindu tenets, which he gleaned from his vast and varied readings. These Hindu beliefs, simply put, were that the universe was in harmony, and that every seemingly evil act was balanced by an equivalent act perceived to be good. Further, God (Brahma) was part and parcel of all existence. In the poem *Brahma* Emerson asserts:

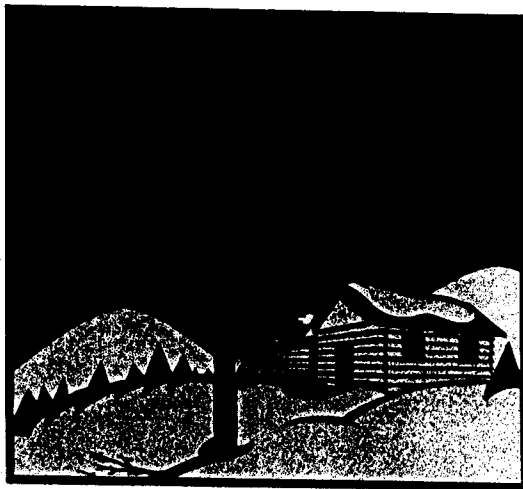
*If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.*

*Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.*

*They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.*

*The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.*

Concord, Massachusetts: The Epicenter



*“Well, then, let’s be off. Shall we to the Concord?
There’s good sport there if the water be not too high.”*

The Hermit to the Poet, from Walden

Transcendentalism Factsheet

Transcendentalism was a cultural movement that had philosophical, literary, and social aspects. It was also part of a larger cultural and literary phenomenon now known as the American Renaissance that took place from about 1835-1860. Although those calling themselves Transcendentalists were relatively few in number, their influence has been far-reaching and is still felt today.

Roots of Transcendentalism

- 1) Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781
- 2) German and English Romanticism
- 3) Neo-Platonism
- 4) Deism
- 5) Scottish Common Sense
- 6) American Protestantism and Idealism
- 7) Hinduism and other Eastern religions and philosophies

Major Tenets

- 1) The individual is important, inherently good, and has free will.
- 2) Conscience, intuition, and morality are present at birth.
- 3) The basic truths of existence and human kind's place in the universe lie beyond the knowledge we obtain from our senses.
- 4) Intuition is the tool the individual must use to *transcend* sensory knowledge and perceive these basic truths.
- 5) Within each individual is a genius that is connected to God.
- 6) God is considered to be the Universal Soul, or the Over-Soul, present throughout Nature
- 7) One of the best ways to find our genius and connect with the Over-Soul is by contemplating and studying Nature.

Major Transcendentalists (Major Writings in Parentheses)

- 1) Ralph Waldo Emerson (*Nature, Self-Reliance, The American Scholar, The Divinity School Address, Representative Men, Fate, Journals*, and a number of important poems.)
- 2) Henry David Thoreau (*Walden, Civil Disobedience, Life Without Principle, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Cape Cod, The Maine Woods, Journals*)
- 3) A. Bronson Alcott (*Record of a School: Conversations with Children on the Gospels*)
- 4) Margaret Fuller (*Woman in the Nineteenth Century, Summer on the Lakes*, editor of *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist periodical)
- 5) Elizabeth Peabody (*A Last Evening with Allston, Chronological History of the United States*)
- 6) Theodore Parker (*Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion, Letter to the People of the United States Touching the Matter of Slavery, Massachusetts Quarterly Review*)
- 7) William Ellery Channing (*Poems of Sixty-Five Years; Thoreau, the Poet-Naturalist*)
- 8) George Ripley, President of Brook Farm communal living experiment (*Discourses on the Philosophy of Religion*)

Transcendentalism's Influence

- 1) Abolition (Anti-Slavery Movement in the United States)
- 2) Utopianism (Brook Farm, Fruitlands)
- 3) The Decades-Long Campaign for Women's Suffrage and Equal Rights
- 4) Environmental Movement
- 5) American Civil Rights Movement (specifically, Thoreau's essay *Civil Disobedience*, which influenced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and also influenced Gandhi in his struggle for Indian independence from Britain.)
- 6) American Literature (especially Walt Whitman, and, to a lesser extent, Emily Dickinson)

Transcendentalism Is...

"Shall we say, then, that Transcendentalism is the Saturnalia or excess of Faith; the presentiment of a faith proper to man in his integrity, excessive only when his imperfect obedience hinders the satisfaction of his wish. Nature is transcendental, exists primarily, necessarily, ever works and advances, yet takes no thought for the morrow."—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Transcendentalist*

"Literally a passing beyond all media in the approach to the Deity, Transcendentalism contained an effort to establish, mainly by the discipline of the intuitive faculty, direct intercourse between the soul and God."—Charles J. Woodbury, *Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson*

"Transcendentalism did not transform American life, but it did change—and continues to change— individual American lives. Transcendentalism was not only a literary, philosophical, and religious movement; it was also, inescapably, a social and political movement as well. In philosophy transcendentalism taught—teaches—that even in a world of objective knowledge, the subjective consciousness and the conscious subject can never be left out of the reckoning.... In religion transcendentalism teaches that the religious spirit is a necessary aspect of human nature—or of the human condition—and that the religious spirit does not reside in external forms, words, ceremonies, or institutions."—Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson, The Mind on Fire*

Transcendentalism "means that there is more in the mind than enters it through the senses."— Amos Bronson Alcott

"I should have told them at once that I was a transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations."—Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*

"Transcendentalism was a reaction against both Unitarianism and Trinitarianism, neither of which possessed any belief in the self-sufficiency of the human mind outside of revelation. It spoke for an order of truth that transcended, by immediate perception, all external evidence."— Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England*

Concord in American History

The river and the historic town through which it courses share the same name—Concord. Yet the name is a misleading one, for it denotes a state of agreement and harmony, and the town, which lies just west of Boston, has ever been the epicenter of ferment.

It was at the Old North Bridge less than a mile from the town center that the first full engagement of the Revolution began on April 19, 1775. It ended in a full-blown battle and an American victory which was no small part the result of the ferocious tenacity of the local militiamen who, driven by radical notions of liberty, chased the well-trained British Regulars all the way back to Charlestown in a deadly rout.

From an upstairs window of a parsonage located just about a hundred yards from the bridge the minister's young son witnessed the beginning of an ideological and political revolution. In this same house 60 years later it was that boy's own son, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, driven by radical notions of the infinitude of the private man, wrote *Nature*, a small book which ignited the philosophical revolution called Transcendentalism.

Concord was founded by twelve pioneer families in 1635, the time of the first Pilgrims and succeeding Puritans who sought to establish God's Kingdom on earth. The leader of those pioneers was the Puritan minister Peter Bulkeley, Emerson's direct ancestor. That first winter, in order to survive the deadly cold, those families had to burrow into the hillside that ran and still runs next to what was to become the route to Boston, the same route the fleeing British Regulars took 140 years later.

At first finding farming to be an unexpectedly difficult proposition, the enterprising settlers dammed the river, creating a man-made pond, then built a mill. By the time of the Revolution, Concord was enjoying a thriving commerce, and in the 19th-century the railroad reached out from Boston. Once again Concord found itself in the middle of a revolution, this time an industrial one. It was here in the 1840's and 1850's that Ephraim Bull developed the Concord grape, on a farm situated next to that same Lexington Road.

Concord, as did other New England townships and villages, created its own system of public schools. Though crude by today's standards and irregularly attended, these schools were a testimony to the community's belief in the nurturing of young minds as a means to the end of developing citizens who would preserve the liberties purchased at the Old North Bridge, the Battle Green in Lexington, and the intervening Battle Road.

This love for liberty easily translated into a hatred of slavery, and no community in America was more stridently or openly abolitionist. The Lexington Road thus became an essential route on the Underground Railroad.

Emerson and his Promethean reputation drew other intellectual giants to reside in Concord—among them Nathaniel Hawthorne and Bronson Alcott—and many others to visit frequently and for extended stays. Its own native son, born David Henry Thoreau, contributed his own at times taciturn and at other times tempestuous genius to this moiling mix of sages and reformers. Concord became a site of intellectual and moral pilgrimage, and the epicenter of what would later be called the American Renaissance.

Concord In the Time Of the Transcendentalists

When Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was not a native of Concord, in 1834 moved with his mother to the home of his grandfather and father, the Old North Bridge could no longer be seen from the upstairs window. It had been, as Emerson wrote in his poem *Concord Hymn*, "swept down the dark stream which seaward creeps." Nor was he to abide long in the house which Nathaniel Hawthorne, a later resident, would name the Old Manse. In 1835 he married and bought a house on the other side of the Milldam, or Concord Center, located at the fork of the Cambridge Turnpike and the Lexington Road. Along that same road would reside the Alcott family—Bronson, his wife Abigail May, and his daughters Anna, May, Elizabeth, and Louisa May—first in the house called Hillside and then in the Orchard House. These houses were and still are separated by a steep wooded acclivity used by Hawthorne for his solitary walks after he and his family moved back to Concord and replaced the Alcotts as residents of Hillside. He renamed that house the Wayside and added a tower which he used as a study. Harriet Lothrop, who wrote *The Five Little Peppers* books under the pseudonym Margaret Sidney, lived in the Wayside after Hawthorne's death.

Thoreau was frequently to be seen at these residences, and he both befriended and tutored the Emerson and Alcott children. Thoreau was also a welcome visitor at the Old Manse when the recently married Nathaniel and Sophia Peabody lived there in the early 1840's. Henry resided mainly in the Thoreau family's Texas house, which he had helped his father build, but he also lived with the Emersons for extended periods and spent another two years, two months, and two days at Walden Pond on land owned by Emerson. And, of course, he also spent a night in the Concord jail.

Paul Brooks, in his *The People of Concord* (Globe Pequot Press, 1990), examines life in Concord in 1846, a year that epitomizes the era of the Transcendentalists. Thoreau was in the midst of his sojourn at Walden Pond, Emerson was at the height of his influence, and the nearby Brook Farm Transcendentalist Commune was still in operation. He describes a prosperous community of 2000 people, proud of their 200-year heritage and fiercely independent. Concordians, however, were interested in the prosperity of the mind as well as the body. Brooks points out that "at every level of society, Education—with a capital E—was seen as the key to the good life....Intellectually and spiritually, it was springtime in New England....Emerson had hoped to make Concord a haven for scholars, for creative thinkers, for people of vision who shared his faith in self-reliance and in the perfectability of the human race. That goal was never achieved....Yet it was thanks to him that the Alcotts and Hawthornes were in residence in the 1840's, that the talented and formidable Margaret Fuller was a frequent visitor, and that young poets and other of Emerson's 'disciples' were giving a literary—some might say rarefied—atmosphere to the town." (Pages 5-8)

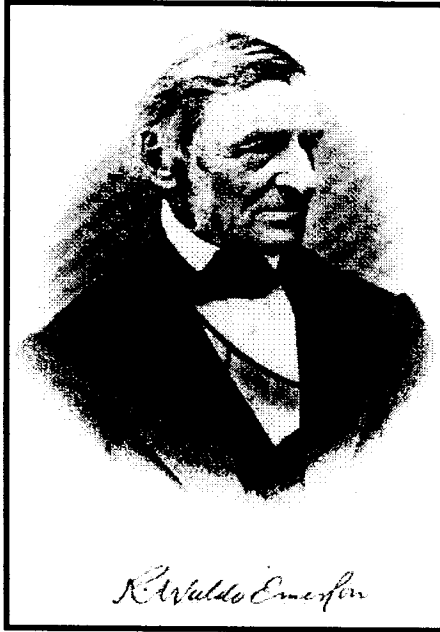
Concord Today

Concord today is a prosperous and bustling yet attractively pleasant community of about 16,000 people which has managed to retain its individual character in the shadow of the metropolis that is today's Boston. It recognizes its importance in American history and culture, and takes proper care of its shrines, but has steadfastly refused to let itself become a "living-history theme park" for the amusement and edification of its visitors. Real people with real business to attend today walk the same streets as did Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Fuller, the Peabodys, the Ripleys and the Alcotts. The Old Manse, the Orchard House, the Wayside, and Emerson's house are lovingly kept and open to visitors. Walden Pond, much to the chagrin of purists, is a popular state reservation where people can swim and boat and walk and picnic. Some say it is being loved to death. In the summer Concord Center is jammed with traffic, pedestrians, tourists... and pilgrims. In some very important ways Concord is a kind of American mecca, not merely a place to "see the sights" and then move quickly on to the next quaint tour stop, but a destination for serious people who seek to make a connection with something that is permanent and meaningful.

How does the serious visitor, the pilgrim, make this connection? Certainly the historic homes should be visited, as well as the Concord Free Public Library, the Concord Museum, the reconstructed Old North Bridge and accompanying Revolutionary War museum, the Hill Burying Ground, and the Authors' Ridge section of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, where lie buried the Emersons, the Thoreaus, the Hawthornes, the Alcotts, and others. Leave a wildflower beside Thoreau's small stone marker in the family plot, which simply reads "Henry." Leave a red rose on the grave of Hawthorne. Place a small pebble inside the iron railing of Emerson's plot, marked by a rough-hewn, unfinished stalk of granite—immutable Nature bearing witness to a great man's ephemeral existence. This is a solemn yet beautiful place, dappled sunlight filtered through the leaves of large mature trees. Linger and meditate.

Enjoy a refreshing swim in the cold, clear, invigorating waters of Walden Pond, as Henry so often did when he lived here, and even when he didn't. Stop and examine the authentic reproduction of Thoreau's cabin. Admire its workmanship. Thoreau was a careful craftsman in word, work, and deed. Find a smooth, rounded stone and carry it to the site of Thoreau's cabin. Place it on the cairn and say a prayer or meditate. Walk down to the shore on the path which Thoreau himself started when he made his morning ablutions 150 years ago. Run your eyes around the tree-filled shoreline, but remember that what Thoreau saw was a "woods" with far fewer trees. There have been some improvements at Walden Pond since Thoreau's time. Those who would take away the public beach, the beach house, and the other recreational facilities to recreate the "pristine" state of Thoreau's time would have to do a lot of clear-cutting to reproduce Thoreau's view. The landfill just across the street from Walden Pond has been closed. The woods surrounding the state reservation are being preserved from commercial development. The Thoreau Institute, a collaboration of the Thoreau Society and the Walden Woods Project, is up and running at Baker Farm, just down the road and up the hill from Walden Pond. Here Thoreau's legacy is not merely being preserved but disseminated through the intensive training of local teachers.

The essential elements necessary to connect with America's literary and cultural heritage are still in place and accessible to the honest pilgrim at Concord.



*Theory and
Application:
Emerson and Thoreau*

Emerson and Thoreau



At a Glance



Emerson...

- ◆ Born: 1803, in Boston, MA
- ◆ Died: 1882, in Concord, MA
- ◆ Transcendentalist, Philosopher, Lecturer, Poet and Essayist
- ◆ Ordained Unitarian minister and becomes junior pastor of Second Church, Boston, 1829.
- ◆ Marries Ellen Tucker, 1829.
- ◆ Ellen Tucker dies, 1831.
- ◆ Resigns ministry, 1832.
- ◆ Travels to Europe, where he meets Carlyle, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, 1832-1833.
- ◆ Begins career as lecturer, 1834.
- ◆ Marries Lydia (Lidian), 1835.
- ◆ Essay *Nature* published, 1836.
- ◆ Founds Hedge (later named Transcendental) Club, 1836.
- ◆ Gives *The American Scholar Address* at Harvard, 1837.
- ◆ Commencement Address at Harvard Divinity School, 1838.
- ◆ Helps found *The Dial*, 1840.
- ◆ *Essays (First Series)*, 1841.
- ◆ Son Waldo dies, 1841.
- ◆ Thoreau lives with Emersons, 1841-1843.
- ◆ Emerson allows Thoreau to use Walden Pond plot, 1845-1847.
- ◆ *Poems* published, 1846.
- ◆ *Representative Men*, 1850.
- ◆ Letter to Walt Whitman, 1855.
- ◆ *English Traits*, 1856.
- ◆ *The Conduct of Life*, 1860.
- ◆ *Society and Solitude*, 1870.

Thoreau...

- ◆ Born: 1817, in Concord, MA
- ◆ Died: 1862, in Concord, MA
- ◆ Transcendentalist, Writer, Naturalist, Teacher, Lecturer, Surveyor
- ◆ Taught at Concord Center Public School in 1837.
- ◆ Founded and operated private school with brother John from 1838-1841.
- ◆ One of the original contributors to *The Dial* in 1840.
- ◆ Became closely associated with Emerson and lived with the Emerson family from 1841-43.
- ◆ Lived in cabin at Walden Pond from 1845-1847, where he wrote *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.
- ◆ Spent one night in jail in 1846 for refusing to pay his poll tax to protest slavery and the Mexican War.
- ◆ Essay about civil disobedience published in 1849 entitled *Resistance to Civil Government*.
- ◆ *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* published in 1854.
- ◆ Publicly defends John Brown in lecture and writing in 1859.
- ◆ Turns attention to scientific observations and writings in late 1850's-early 1860's.
- ◆ Travels to Minnesota in 1861.
- ◆ Dies of tuberculosis in 1862.

The Essential Emerson and Thoreau

"The gifted man is he who sees the essential point and leaves all the rest aside."

Thomas Carlyle, *The Hero as Poet*

Emerson's Importance...

- ◆ The driving force of American Transcendentalism, which played a key role in arousing the nation's conscience and re-directing the American consciousness toward equality of opportunity.
- ◆ Nineteenth-century America's foremost philosopher, explaining clearly the difference between Materialism and Idealism and demonstrating the existence of transcendent reality.
- ◆ His essays and lectures defined American individualism and expressed the optimism of human potential.
- ◆ The friend and supporter of Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, A. Bronson Alcott, Theodore Parker, and many other Transcendentalists.

The Essential Emerson...

Essays and Addresses that need to be read to gain a basic understanding of Emerson's Idealist philosophy:

- ◆ *Nature*
- ◆ *Self-Reliance*
- ◆ *The American Scholar*
- ◆ *The Divinity School Address*
- ◆ *Representative Men*
- ◆ *Fate*

Recommended books about Emerson:

- ◆ Allen, Gay Wilson. *Waldo Emerson*. New York: Penguin Books, 1981.
- ◆ Baker, Carlos. *Emerson Among the Eccentrics*. New York: Viking, 1996.
- ◆ Richardson, Robert D., Jr. *Emerson, The Mind on Fire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Thoreau's Importance...

- ◆ Author of *WALDEN; or, LIFE IN THE WOODS*. One of the most important non-fiction books written by an American, it demonstrates how the tenets of Transcendentalism can be applied to the practical concerns of everyday life, and firmly establishes the importance of nature in living that life.
- ◆ Author of *Civil Disobedience*, which greatly influenced both the Mahatma, Gandhi, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- ◆ The fountainhead of the environmental movement, whose writings inspired John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and many others.
- ◆ One of the foremost Naturalists of the nineteenth century, whose discoveries and observations have in most instances stood the test of time.

The Essential Thoreau...

Books and essays that need to be read to gain a basic understanding of Thoreau:

- ◆ *WALDEN; or, LIFE IN THE WOODS*
- ◆ *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*
- ◆ *The Maine Woods*
- ◆ *Civil Disobedience*
- ◆ *Life Without Principle*
- ◆ *Faith in a Seed*

Recommended books about Thoreau:

- ◆ Harding, Walter. *The Days of Henry Thoreau*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- ◆ Hicks, John H. *Thoreau in Our Season*. The University of Massachusetts Press, 1962.
- ◆ Richardson, Robert D., Jr. *Henry Thoreau, A Life of the Mind*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Emerson In Depth

Page One

"Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."

Life's path seemed predetermined for the young Ralph Waldo Emerson. For six generations at least one of the men in his family had been a New England minister, and at the age of 26 the Harvard graduate continued this tradition into the seventh generation when he was ordained and appointed to the post of junior pastor at the Second Church, Boston, in 1829. That same year he married the woman whom he passionately loved, Ellen Tucker, eight years younger than he. The poverty of his early years, the family illnesses, the struggle to see that each of the Emerson brothers completed his college education, all these formidable challenges had been willingly met and most had been overcome. Emerson's talents and intellect had been recognized and rewarded, and his future seemed assured.

But, as Emerson had already learned intellectually through his close and comprehensive readings of Plato, perception is not necessarily reality, and what seems to be permanent often proves to be ephemeral. In 1831 his beloved 19-year-old wife died of consumption, what we today call tuberculosis, which was the great killer of the last century. The underpinnings of Emerson's reality were shaken. His faith in what he was preaching on Sunday from the high pulpit of his church was called into question. He was a man adrift in a spiritual crisis that would have broken a person who did not possess an abundance of moral courage, and while this tragedy did not destroy him, it did transform him. What he became was the fountainhead in America for a different way of looking at and living in the world—Transcendentalism.

On Christmas Day, 1832, a physically ill and spiritually adrift Emerson sailed for Europe. Here he would immerse himself in an Old World culture brimming with new ideas. He had always been a voracious reader, and he was now able to meet some of the men whose words had helped to frame his world view. He talked at length with the great Romantic poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He met John Stuart Mill, as well as the sculptors Horatio Greenough and Bertel Thorwaldsen. As Walt Whitman was later to write in his poem *There Was a Child Went Forth* (*Whitman: The Library of America*, 491):

*There was a child went forth every day,
An the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain
part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years....
The horizon's edge, the flying sea-crow, the fragrance of salt
marsh and shore mud,
These became part of that child who went forth every
day, and who now goes forth, and will always go forth every day.*

Emerson in Depth, page 2

Much like the child in Whitman's poem, Emerson absorbed Rome, Paris, and London. They became part of him for "stretching cycles years," informing his lectures and essays. His most important meeting, however, did not occur in any of these great cities; rather, it took place in the Scottish Highland village of Ecclefechan, the home of Thomas Carlyle.

Carlyle had been slow to gain recognition and fame, and when he welcomed Emerson his greatest work still lay ahead of him. His tongue-in-cheek treatment of Transcendentalism, *Sartor Resartus*, had just been completed the previous year, and his epic history of the French Revolution would not be completed until 1837. But as Robert D. Richardson makes clear in his biography *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (University of California Press, 1995) Emerson had already read a number of Carlyle's essays, which had drawn much of their inspiration from the German Romantics and Transcendentalists. In 1827 Carlyle had published *The State of German Literature*, which impressed Emerson greatly. Richardson states:

More than any other piece, The State of German Literature is the call-to-arms of transcendentalism. One can see Emerson's American Scholar and Whitman's American poet in Carlyle's praise of Fichte who said, "There is a Divine Idea pervading the visible universe; which visible universe is indeed but a symbol and sensible manifestation," and who then insisted that not theologians but "literary men are the appointed interpreters of this Divine Idea: a perpetual priesthood, we might say, standing forth, generation after generation, as the dispensers and living types of God's everlasting wisdom, to show and embody it in their writings and actions, in such particular forms as their own particular times require it in." (146)

Richardson tells us that Carlyle and Emerson "hit it off at once," and one of the three great friendships of Emerson's life, and of literary history, began. Emerson returned to America reinvigorated and ready to start life anew.

Having earlier resigned his ministry, Emerson embarked on a new career—that of lecturer and writer. This was a daring and risky move on Emerson's part, and it squared well with the "reborn" Emerson's new world view. Today it's taken for granted that a person of Emerson's stature would have had no difficulty in such an enterprise; but it must be remembered that in 1834 Emerson, while well-known and respected in some circles, did not yet have that stature. Until that time only one individual—Washington Irving—had been able to earn a substantial living with the pen alone. Edgar Allan Poe insisted on such a course for himself, and would die penniless. Emerson succeeded because he had a message that Americans—especially young Americans—were ready to hear. The meeting hall and lyceum would provide the secular pulpit from which he would preach the new gospel of optimism to an optimistic nation. That year he also moved from Boston to Concord.

In 1835 he remarried. He changed his wife's first name from Lydia to Lidian (the reason is unclear; perhaps Emerson felt it sounded more lyrical), which she accepted. She called him Mr. Emerson, bore him four children, and remained his steadfast friend and supporter for 47 years. She was not a replacement for Ellen Tucker. Ellen had been the ideal wife of that first life. Lidian, or "Queenie" as he privately called her (Carlos Baker, *Emerson Among the Eccentrics*, Viking, 1996, 38), would be the proper companion for this one.

That same year Emerson met the man with whom he would form the second great friendship of his life, Amos Bronson Alcott. Alcott, the self-educated educator who, through his Temple School in Boston was attempting to drag American education kicking and screaming out of the Dark Ages, had heard Emerson lecture, liked what he heard, and would

Emerson in Depth, page 3

not be satisfied until he had met him. As for Emerson, he had read Elizabeth Peabody's account of the Temple School and had been greatly impressed by Alcott's goals and methods. As with Carlyle, Emerson formed an immediate bond with Alcott when they finally met.

The following year, 1836, Emerson published *Nature*, which today stands as the starting point of Transcendentalism in America. In this essay Emerson proclaims the importance of nature as the primary means of connecting with the *Over-Soul*, the *Universal Being* who is the source of Truth, Beauty, and Virtue. The Transcendental Club also met for the first time in 1836. The young and the idealistic were coming to Concord, but the most promising of the group that gathered about Emerson in 1837 was a native of Concord. A recent Harvard graduate he had—while still a student—been examined by Emerson, who in his turn had been impressed and had recommended him for a partial scholarship. He would be Emerson's third great friend; his name was Henry David Thoreau.

In short order, Emerson would deliver two of his most important addresses. The first, entitled *The American Scholar*, given before Harvard's Phi Beta Kappa Society in 1837, would be pronounced by Oliver Wendell Holmes to be America's "intellectual Declaration of Independence." It called on the new generation to be life-long scholars, to learn by doing, to think bravely for themselves, and to search for the truth by separating appearance from reality. While *The American Scholar* was widely praised, *The Divinity School Address* of 1838, again given at Harvard, caused great consternation among the Unitarian establishment, who condemned Emerson's "blasphemous" message to the soon-to-be ministers. Instead of reaffirming the traditional religious precepts about Christ, which these students had had drilled into them, Emerson's purpose was to assert the divinity of man—the potential of all human beings to find God within themselves. He was not asked to speak again at Harvard for almost 30 years.

In 1841, as part of his *Essays, First Series*, Emerson published *Self-Reliance*. A ringing endorsement of individualism, it calls on us to think our own thoughts, to speak what we believe, to live in the present, "above time." Most importantly, *Self-Reliance* stirringly encourages us to trust in ourselves; after all, "if we live truly, we shall see truly."

During the early 1840's he and another good friend, Margaret Fuller, took turns editing the *Dial* quarterly Transcendentalist periodical. Both found it to be a thankless but necessary responsibility. Both he and Thoreau refused to move to the Brook Farm Transcendentalist commune in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, but they were frequent visitors and lecturers. Emerson refused to, as he put it, exchange his own private prison for a more public one.

Tragedy again struck in 1841 when Emerson's son Waldo, age 5, died of scarlet fever. Emerson once more found his beliefs shaken. In *Threnody*, his moving eulogy for his son, Emerson laments that all the power of Nature could not save him and cannot recall him. This time, however, Emerson's faith survived.

What did Emerson believe? He insisted on human dignity. He was opposed to slavery and any institution or practice that had as its purpose the limiting or restraint of the individual. Each of us has a "spark of the divine" that constituted a direct connection with God. His extensive readings of Hindu philosophy had reinforced his notion of an *Over-Soul*

Emerson in Depth, page 4

who permeated all things, both animate and inanimate. This *Over-Soul* was “the God in us,” and we had to be unfettered and educated so that we could carry on our own journey of self-discovery, as he had been able to do.

He believed in the essential goodness of humanity and benevolence of the universe. Nature was not an adversary to be defeated; rather, it was the outward manifestation of Beauty and Virtue. *When was Beauty manifest?* According to Emerson, Beauty occurred when something was in its proper form performing its proper function. *When was Virtue present?* Virtue existed in an individual who had accepted the place in the world that the Universal Being had set aside for him or her. *Did evil exist?* According to Emerson, what we perceive to be good and evil, then, are really manifestations of the *Mind* of the *Universal Being*, and act to balance each other. Emerson insisted that there was an overall harmony in the universe that we could only comprehend through transcendental experience.

Does an individual have free will, or does Fate control his or her destiny? Emerson came to believe that both free will and Fate co-existed, but the self-reliant, rugged individual could overcome the destiny that heredity and society had set aside for him or her. In his famous phrase, “Intellect annuls fate.”

Emerson’s influence on the American mind has been immense. He has goaded succeeding generations of Americans to consider carefully what is permanent and worthwhile, as opposed to what is ephemeral and trivial. He continually urges us to “wake up” to the true reality and reach out for the essential truth. As Richard Geldard states in *The Vision of Emerson* (Element Books, 1995):

And we can also recognize that the self-knowledge we seek is not merely a matter of being more alert in the ordinary sense of that word,... What Emerson tells us is that we tend to shut down in the face of daily life and remain satisfied with the surfaces of things (20).

Emerson insists that we keep our eyes open to the Light which reveals Virtue, Beauty, and Truth. Though that Light may at first hurt our eyes as we emerge from the Darkness of unthinking conformity, if we keep them open our eyes will soon adjust to the reality of a better world.

Not everyone today sings the praises of Emerson. For example, Christopher Newfield, in his *The Emerson Effect, Individualism and Submission in America* (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), criticizes Emerson’s legacy, calling him “the principal architect” of the American tradition of “submission to authority” that has “weakened our autonomy and democracy alike” (1). He asserts that Emerson, who had refused to reside at Brook Farm, succeeded in “substituting the corporate for democratic ways of living as an individual in mass society and (did) this in the name of individual freedom” (6). Newfield goes on to coin the term “submissive individualism” for this “corporate” way of living in today’s world.

Whether true or not, Emerson would probably congratulate Newfield for his attempt to see American society and Emerson’s own legacy in a novel, if not complimentary, way. For Emerson, that was the whole point.

Thoreau In Depth

Page One

"No man ever followed his genius till it misled him."

Part One: The Individualist

By definition, an individualist is a nonconformist who supports the right of others to maintain their own individuality. Henry David Thoreau was a true individualist in that while he was adamant about preserving the integrity of his own individuality, he was also insistent that *all people have a basic right, a basic duty, to keep theirs intact as well*. This latter insistence is an important aspect of Thoreau's philosophy that is often overlooked. He was not interested in spending his life practicing what his great friend and early mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson derided as "mere selfism." Thoreau realized that society was the frame within which the self-portrait of a person's life had to be drawn. Robert D. Richardson, in his intellectual biography, *Henry Thoreau, A Life of the Mind* (University of California Press, 1986) points out that Thoreau believed "society was only the means to the end of individual self-fulfillment, and not the other way around" (31). Thoreau came to this conclusion early in his adult life, as an early *Journal* entry attests. In 1838 he wrote, "Society was made for man. Man is not at once born into society, — hardly into the world. The world that he is hides for a time the world that he inhabits" (Volume 1, 36). The words "The world that he is" are at once stunning and telling in that he is declaring not only the primacy but also the completeness of the individual. Nevertheless, Thoreau realized that as a practical matter a person had to learn how to live in the world, among other people. As he stated in his *Journal* that same year,

In obedience to an instinct of their nature men have pitched their cabins and planted corn and potatoes within speaking distance of one another, and so formed towns and villages, but they have not associated, they have only assembled, and society has signified only a convention of men (Volume 1, 39).

Thoreau was insistent, as he wrote in *Walden*, that within the framework of society people needed to *search themselves* to discover the life paths that were right for them and then to *assert themselves* once that discovery was made.

One young man of my acquaintance, who has inherited some acres, told me that he thought he should live as I did, if he had the means. I would not have any one adopt my mode of living on any account; for, beside that before he has fairly learned it I may have found out another for myself, I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead. The youth may build or plant or sail, only let him not be hindered from doing that which he tells me he would like to do (*Walden, An Annotated Edition*, edited by Walter Harding, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995, 68).

Thoreau in Depth, page 2

While Thoreau sought recognition, he did not desire followers, not because he disliked people, but because he recognized that the one life a person has to live should not be spent foolishly chasing another person's dreams. Thoreau's impatience with those who refused to search and assert themselves, who were too timid to break free of the expectations of others, has often been misinterpreted as a dislike for humanity in general. Once I attended a Saturday high school graduation party for a close relative's daughter. My finished grades were due 8 a.m. that Monday morning; as a result, I was in the awkward position of having to grade examinations off and on during the celebration. One man whom I did not know asked if he could scan the exam questions. He seemed to be an erudite individual. To the question, "Why did Thoreau go to live in the woods by Walden Pond?" he answered, "To get away from people. He was a misanthrope, wasn't he?" I gave the man a better answer, and saying nothing more, he walked away, leaving me to my work. Thoreau was not a misanthrope, and teachers should make certain that they convey to their students the fact that Thoreau often demonstrated a deep and abiding love for others. Making friends could be difficult for him, but he did make friends. He was, for example, one of the few in Concord to gain the confidence and comradeship of the reclusive Nathaniel Hawthorne. Thoreau was also popular with the children of Concord, and he was a natural and gifted teacher. He never refused a request for help from a neighbor. He was no hermit when he lived at Walden Pond, making frequent visits to Concord to take care of business, socialize, work, or take meals with his family. He often stopped on his daily walks to talk with the farmers who were trying to work in their fields. He dearly loved his brother John, who died in his arms after contracting lockjaw. He fell in love and suffered the sting of rejection. For all his individualism and nonconformity, then, Henry David Thoreau was a man who lived in the world.

He was distressed, however, by the human tendency to seek the material over the spiritual, to desire the frivolous over the substantial. He bore no patience toward hypocrisy, and he seethed at human brutality with its attendant cruelty, destruction, and waste. To paraphrase Thoreau's famous declaration from his essay *Civil Disobedience*, he sought not at once a perfect humanity, but *at once a better humanity*. He concluded early on that the path to a better humanity lay through the soul of the individual.

Thoreau subscribed to the Transcendentalist belief that while people were limited without, they were unlimited within—that they had the innate ability to find the Truth that would in turn lead them to Beauty and Virtue. If each one of us were to accomplish this feat, then humanity would "enjoy its perfect summer day at last" (*Walden, Annotated Edition*, 324). How could this be done? Emerson maintained that one had to connect with the *Over-Soul*, or the *Universal Being*, to find this Truth, and one of the best ways to make this connection was by returning to Nature for contemplation and meditation. Thoreau believed that Nature could provide the truth-seeker with the needed tools to conduct his or her search.

Silence is the communing of a conscious soul with itself. If the soul attend for a moment to its own infinity, then and there is silence.... Those divine sounds which are uttered to our inward ear—which are breathed in with the zephyr or reflected from the lake,—come to us noiselessly, bathing the temples of the soul, as we stand motionless amid the rocks....

Thoreau in Depth, page 3

Silence is the universal refuge, the sequel of all dry discourses and all foolish acts, as balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety as after disappointment... It were vain for me to interpret the Silence. She cannot be done into English. For six thousand years have men translated her, with what fidelity belonged to each; still she is little better than a sealed book (Journal, Volume 1, 64, 65, 67-69).

Robert Dickens, in his book *Thoreau: The Complete Individualist* (Exposition Press, 1974) points out that Thoreau “had no illusions that somehow science would save us like the cavalry in bad Westerns....He believed that people would have to change first, and his individualism reflected his belief that people could only be changed individually, not socially or in large numbers” (87). Dickens adds that “Thoreau was part of a romantic (in a non-derogatory sense) reaction, and was not making a purely negative protest against science or industrialization so much as he was making a positive protest *for* the value of human individuality” (88).

Much of this value stems from *Intuition*, which is innate in the individual and can be accessed if the person strives to live a life in Virtue and Beauty and in search of the Truth. Put simply, as Emerson stated in his essay *Self-Reliance*, “If we live truly, we shall see truly.”

Part Two: The Social Activist

Thoreau’s reliance on the power of the individual to effect change governed every aspect of his social activism. His most famous individual reaction to social injustice was his refusal to pay his poll tax, which resulted in his arrest and a one-night stay in the Concord jail. This occurred in the midst of his sojourn at Walden Pond, and he had only come to Concord that day to retrieve his boots from the cobbler’s. There he was accosted by the town constable, Sam Staples, and the rest is history. This relatively benign brush with the power of the state provided Thoreau with the seed of an idea which would effect world history—civil disobedience.

Of course, Thoreau invented neither the concept nor the term; at various times in western history individuals had defied what they believed to be unjust actions on the part of the state and had paid dearly for following their consciences. What Thoreau did, first in a public lecture about his experience and then in the famous essay originally entitled *Resistance to Civil Government*, was to lay out for the world a blueprint for conducting civil disobedience as well as a justification for it, in terms easy to understand and difficult to dispute.

*Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?—in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right (Civil Disobedience, from *The Portable Thoreau*, edited by Carl Bode, Penguin Books, 111).*

Here Thoreau attempts to debunk the notion that the majority is necessarily right,

Thoreau in Depth, page 4

insisting that the conscience must take precedence. If one considers his assertion in the context of Transcendentalist philosophy, Thoreau's argument has a syllogistic logic:

- *If John Q. Citizen "lives truly, he will see truly," according to Emerson.*
- *If John Q. is "seeing truly," he is necessarily seeing through the Transparent Eyeball of the Over-Soul, and his view of the rightness of a particular situation, dictated by his conscience, is the correct one, even if everyone else sees things differently.*
- *John, then, has become a "majority of one."*
- *If everyone were to live as "truly" as John, then the collective conscience would be in sync with John's conscience, and would have the same opinion of the rightness of that situation.*

In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau also makes a distinction between a *citizen* and a *subject*. A *subject* is one who, even if legally "free," is bound to the dictates of the country's ruling elite. A *citizen*, on the other hand, is one who has an equal voice in the conduct of the country's affairs. The *citizen*, moreover, has a *moral obligation* to speak out and, if necessary, even act in opposition if those who have been elected the country's leaders are conducting the country's business immorally or unjustly. History demonstrates that, in this context, the virtuous individual has often been the "majority of one."

Thoreau's social activism resulted from his self-concept as both a citizen and a virtuous individual. He believed that to live truly, he had to follow the dictates of what Emerson called his *genius*, which was connected with the Over-Soul. Thoreau was a practical man who desired to live his own life, but he recognized that evil did exist, and he could not live his own life in good conscience if he even implicitly supported evil. Accordingly, faced with what was demonstrably a state-sponsored evil—slavery—Thoreau felt morally obligated to act.

*It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting on another man's shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations too (*Civil Disobedience, The Portable Thoreau*, 117).*

He recognized that he indeed was "sitting on another man's shoulders"—the slave's—and he was impelled to do his part to lift that weight. Slavery at that time was called "the peculiar institution," and many in the North claimed that this abhorrent as well as aberrant stain on the national character would necessarily extinguish itself, as all aberrations eventually do. Through his studies of the natural world and his knowledge of human nature, however, Thoreau understood that, if left alone, aberrations often became the norm.

*If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth,—certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn (*Civil Disobedience, The Portable Thoreau*, 119-120).*

Thoreau in Depth, page 5

Thoreau's concept of civil disobedience, then, is a very practical application of the moral imperative. Mohandas K. Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as is well known, were both strongly influenced by this essay. But a close reading reveals that what these great men *inferred* from *Civil Disobedience* is not what Thoreau *actually stated* about the nature of resistance to civil government. The overall tone of the text, as well as the examples used, certainly implies the method of non-violent, passive resistance in which both Gandhi and King engaged. But nowhere in this essay does Thoreau actually condemn the use of force to effect the changes necessary to achieve a just society. Two later essays, *Slavery in Massachusetts* and *A Plea for Captain John Brown*, as well as a number of public lectures, make it very clear that Thoreau did indeed have a harder side that condoned the use of force as a necessary means to a just end.

Joan Cooney, in her article *Neither Nonresistance Nor Violence: Thoreau's Consistent Response to Social Evils* (*The Concord Saunterer, New Series*, Volume 3, Fall, 1995, 133-139), helpfully makes a clear distinction between *force* and *violence*. According to Cooney, who uses William Robert Miller's 1964 book *Nonviolence: A Christian Interpretation* (Association Press) as her source:

Force is direct action that imposes itself in an existing violent situation. It may take the form of removing, restraining, or interfering with some violent or evil action already under way. Force differs from violence in that the main objective is the redemption of a bad situation, not the injury of persons nor the destruction of property (138).

Thoreau had long been an active supporter of abolition. He participated in the Underground Railroad, even using his cabin on Walden Pond to greet runaway slaves at night, from this secluded place escorting them to the next way-station. He was instrumental in bringing John Brown to Concord to speak, and both spoke out and wrote in support of Brown after the raid on Harper's Ferry. In his defense of Brown Thoreau is implicitly making a distinction between *force* and *violence*. In his *Journal* he wrote on October 18, 1859:

It galls me to listen to the remarks of craven-hearted neighbors who speak disparagingly of Brown because he resorted to violence, resisted the government, threw his life away!—what way have they thrown their lives, pray?—neighbors who would praise a man for attacking singly an ordinary band of thieves or murderers. Such minds are not equal to the occasion. They preserve the so-called peace of their community by deeds of petty violence every day. Look at the policeman's billy and handcuffs! Look at the jail! Look at the gallows! Look at the chaplain of the regiment! We are hoping only to live safely on the outskirts of this provisional army. So they defend themselves and our hen-roosts, and maintain slavery.

There sits a tyrant holding fettered four millions of slaves. Here comes the heroic liberator; if he falls, will he not still live? (Volume XII, 401-402)

Where others saw a crazed, violent fanatic, Thoreau saw in John Brown the nemesis of hypocrisy, a man who saw an evil, tried to eradicate it, and paid for the attempt with his life. In our time we are confronted by our own "John Browns," people who have laid down the gauntlet before us, daring us to pick it up, challenging us to join them. Some of these people, whether they be anti-nuclear, pro-life, or pro-environmental activists, have literally "reached the end of their rope" and have resorted to what we consider violence to achieve their ends. As the majority of those Americans who lived in John Brown's time condemned him, the majority of Americans today condemn those who blow up abortion clinics and nail spikes in old growth trees. History has much to teach us, and not just about the dead facts of the past, but we the living as well.

Part Three: The Naturalist

Possibly the most overlooked of Thoreau's accomplishments is his work as a naturalist. A *naturalist* is one who studies nature in its own setting and is deeply concerned with both *how* and *why* natural phenomena occur. In Thoreau's time, the term was almost, but not quite, synonymous with what we today would call a scientist; but then, as now, there existed a distinct difference in purpose and approach. A naturalist places the pursuit of scientific knowledge in the broader context of the search for Truth and does not hesitate to incorporate other disciplines with the scientific method in carrying on that search. One of ways of establishing this context is by finding the correspondence between nature and human nature. To a naturalist, the inner functioning of a leaf, for example, is a corollary to the inner workings of a human being. If we could understand the leaf completely, then we should be able to understand ourselves. This point of view is distinctly different from that of the pure scientist, who would view the leaf and the human being as two different species from two different Linnaeic kingdoms whose only correspondence is the fact of their living existence.

Thoreau's reputation as a naturalist is growing steadily. Lawrence Buell, in his essay *Thoreau and the natural environment*, states, "Thoreau is today considered the first major interpreter of nature in American literary history, and the first American environmentalist saint" (*The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, 171). Frank Stewart, in the prologue to his book *A Natural History of Nature Writing* (Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1995), asserts that "Henry David Thoreau (is) the originator of nature writing in America." William Bartram, who wrote extensively about nature in America in the late 18th-century, may have disagreed, but Stewart here is placing nature writing in the context of a literary genre; and Thoreau definitely raised nature writing to that level. Stewart also points out that:

Thoreau desired to record events as a firsthand witness. This quality alone differentiated him from a good many natural scientists of his age, as much as it set him apart from the dreamers and "sublimo-slipshod" poets, as he called them, who, he felt, had very little real nature in their verse. He did not wish to learn "by inference and deduction and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy" with the facts of the natural world as he found them. By wanting to front nature directly, he separated himself not only from the philosophers in their studies but also from literary men in their libraries (3-4).

While Thoreau spent much of the last years of his too-brief life as a naturalist, his interest in the correspondence of humankind and nature dates back to his reading of Emerson's essay *Nature* in 1836, and his subsequent embrace of Transcendentalism. The Transcendentalists, as did other Romantics, believed that the study and contemplation of nature was one of the major pathways to that ultimate reality that lay beyond the reach of our senses. As he matured and developed his own world view, Thoreau became increasingly involved in studying nature both for its own sake and for the sake of the humanity which inhabits it.

Besides *Walden*, perhaps the greatest non-fiction prose text written by an American, Thoreau wrote a number of essays and some book-length manuscripts which should be classified as both nature writing and scientific study. Among these are *A Natural History of*

Thoreau in Depth, page 7

Massachusetts (1842), *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (much of it written while residing at Walden Pond in 1845-1847), *Walking* (1851), *A Yankee in Canada* (1851), *Autumnal Tints* (1858-1859), *Wild Apples* (1859-1860), *Huckleberries* (1860-1861), *Wild Fruits* (1860-1861), *The Succession of Forest Trees* (1860), and *The Dispersion of Seeds* (1860-1861). The preceding listing, for the most part, is the order of composition of these works, and much of it has been provided by Ronald Wesley Hoag in his essay *Thoreau's later natural history writings* (*Cambridge Companion*, 152). It can be seen that Thoreau, long suffering from consumption, was literally racing against the clock to get as much written as he could before his demise. His early death in 1862 is a great loss for many reasons, but it is tragic that he was not able to complete his work as a naturalist. He had planned, for example, a comprehensive study which he called his *Kalendar*, which would attempt to put the natural world in a comprehensible context. He had both read and discussed Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859, which confirmed much of his own observations and intuitive speculations. Thoreau believed that nature always sought the simplest way to achieve an end; as a result, natural processes could be discerned through direct observation, as Darwin had discerned the process of natural selection through his observations while on the Galapagos Islands. Hoag stresses that Thoreau was

concerned with mankind's perception of and relation to wildness and with the preservation of that wildness in both nature and humanity....Simply stated, the principal message of Walking is that the boundlessness of nature requires an attempt, however necessarily imperfect, at corresponding boundlessness on the part of one who would know it, however necessarily imperfectly (153-154).

This *corresponding boundlessness* is a direct reference to the basic idea of Transcendentalism: the need to *go beyond the bounds of normal sensual experience* and find the ultimate reality that, as Plato would insist, is both permanent and true.

Civil Disobedience

Page One

Definition:

Simply speaking, civil disobedience is a refusal to obey one or more of society's laws. This refusal is not criminal in intent. Those who engage in civil disobedience refuse to abide by laws that they find to be morally wrong. It can also result from deep disagreement with a government's actions. Civil disobedience can take various forms—it can be either non-violent or violent, passively resistant or defiantly aggressive, depending on the goals and philosophy of those participating in the civil disobedience. The purpose of civil disobedience in the short term is to register protest against the laws in question or the government; its ultimate goal, however, is to change or abolish those laws, or the government which enacted them. Those engaging in civil disobedience usually are willing either to accept the penalties for breaking these laws, or other consequences of their defiance.

Historical Background:

While the Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau is often credited with originating the term civil disobedience in the late 1840's with his lecture and essay *Resistance to Civil Government*, the concept itself can be found in some of the earliest accounts of Western Civilization. The ancient Greek tragedy *Antigone* has as its major theme the duty of the individual to obey the laws of God over the laws of men. Another classical Greek play, *Lysistrata*, is an anti-war drama. In the *New Testament*, Jesus Himself engages in a violent form of civil disobedience when he casts out the money-changers from the Temple.

The epic poet John Milton placed himself at risk when he published his essay *Areopagitica* in the mid-1600's, which protested the laws restricting an individual's right to conform to the dictates of his conscience, and to express these dictates freely.

The early stages of the Revolutionary Period in English-speaking North America saw both non-violent and violent civil disobedience on the part of the colonists against the British Parliament's Stamp Act and Townshend Acts in the 1760's.

In the 19th-century United States, civil disobedience was used most persistently by those who worked and fought for the abolition of slavery, particularly after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. This law enraged many in the North, and participation in the Underground Railroad, a form of non-violent civil disobedience, became a badge of honor for people of conscience.

In the early part of the 20th-century, Mohandas K. Gandhi, inspired by Thoreau's essay *Civil Disobedience*, waged a 20-year battle in South Africa for the rights of immigrant Indians. Unlike Thoreau, who was not a pacifist, in both South Africa and later in India Gandhi consistently adhered to a strategy of non-violent passive resistance, which he called *Satyagraha*, which in Sanskrit means "truth and firmness." After his success in South Africa, Gandhi returned to India where he led a 30-year struggle for Indian independence from the British Empire. His campaign of noncooperation with Imperial authorities and his economic boycott of British products were non-violent examples of civil disobedience. Indians participating in both small and large sit-ins were beaten by

Civil Disobedience

Page Two

British soldiers but offered only passive resistance. A notable campaign of non-violent resistance was the imprisonment of at least 100,000 Indians for breaking the Salt Laws in the year-long Salt Campaign. By the 1930's, Gandhi was being revered as the Mahatma by his fellow countrymen and was considered the spiritual father of India. He then decided to use his body as a weapon, and on several occasions fasted to the point of death before the British gave in to his demands. India finally won its independence after the end of World War II. Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu religious zealot in 1948.

In Denmark during World War II, civil disobedience was practiced against the Nazi occupation in spite of the Danish government's demand that all its citizens submit to the Wehrmacht and the Gestapo. The Danish Resistance did not hesitate to use violence against the Germans when deemed necessary.

In the United States, civil disobedience has been a hallmark of both violent and non-violent protest since the early years of the 20th-century. Labor unions, such as the Industrial Workers of the World and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, used non-violence to further the living and working conditions of its members. The CIO's sit-down strikes in the 1930's led to recognition of the United Auto Workers. The unionization of the auto industry in the 1930's and 1940's was one of the key factors in the rise of the American middle class after World War II.

The American civil rights movement, organized by the Congress of Racial

Equality in the 1940's, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1950's and 1960's, successfully employed creative non-violent protest, both passive and proactive, to achieve its ends, although the reaction was often very violent and lethal. A church full of black Sunday school children was fire-bombed, and three civil rights workers were brutally murdered in Mississippi. As with Gandhi, assassination was the price the civil rights movement's most promising leaders paid for the advancement of African-Americans to full citizenship: Medgar Evers in 1963, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968.

The anti-Vietnam War movement used both violent and non-violent means in an effort to stop the conflict. In Vietnam, a number of Buddhist monks immolated themselves on the streets of Saigon to protest the war. In the United States, the Students for a Democratic Society helped to shut down college campuses through student sit-ins, teach-ins, strikes, and violent take-overs of campus buildings. Thousands of students confronted thousands of National Guardsmen both on and off campus. The National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam organized mass rallies, including one that shut down Washington, D.C. So many protesters were arrested in Washington on May Day, 1971, that the Redskins football stadium was pressed into service as a make-shift jail. The other side was just as violent, as evidenced by the repeated clubbing and tear-gassing of demonstrators and the killings of four students at Kent State University in Ohio by the National Guard in 1971.

Civil Disobedience

Page Three

Since the end of the Vietnam War, Americans of all political, religious, and cultural persuasions have employed civil disobedience to protest what they consider to be the government's illegal, immoral, or unconstitutional actions. These protesters routinely go to jail for their beliefs. Their actions have often been non-violent, though usually not passive. The last quarter-century has seen an increasingly militant, aggressive, and proactive form of civil disobedience. Demonstrations that would begin non-violently would quickly degenerate into violent confrontations, resulting not only in the arrest of the demonstrators but also in physical injury and destruction of property. In the 1970's and early 1980's those practicing civil disobedience were more often on the left of the political spectrum, actively confronting supposed polluters, opposing the construction of nuclear power plants or the clear-cutting of redwoods, or demonstrating against nuclear weapons. In the late 1980's and well into the 1990's, those involved in civil disobedience have been most frequently on the political right. *Anti-Abortion Groups*, citing a higher moral law that cannot be compromised, have carried on an increasingly militant and at times violent campaign to shut down every abortion clinic in the United States, despite the fact that these clinics are legal. These "right-to-life" activists compare their movement to the abolitionists of the 19th century. Some of those engaged in the *Militia Movement* have openly disregarded state and federal law, insisting that today's standing government is unconstitutional and does not have to be obeyed.

An on-going protest closely related to the militias is the *Common Law Movement*, which has conducted an organized campaign of harassment against county, state, and federal officials, especially in the western states. The federal government has at times reacted violently, as evidenced by the killings at Ruby Ridge in the early 1990's.

When is Civil Disobedience Justified?

There are two basic justifications for civil disobedience: the *Higher Law Doctrine* and *Natural or Human Rights*.

The *Higher Law Doctrine* "asserts that God's law takes precedence over civil law whenever it can be shown that the two come into conflict." (Edward H. Madden, *Civil Disobedience. The Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 435) In the 1800's one of the inspirations for civil disobedience was Transcendentalism, which held that "the Law of God says that men are morally equal, while certain aspects of civil law in the United States either deny this or prevent its recognition. In view of this conflict, it becomes the duty of an honest man to follow God's law and defy Fugitive Slave Laws and other aspects of the civil law." (Madden, 435) But the Transcendentalists themselves disagreed about the extent to which this method of social protest and reform should be applied in the effort to cure the ills of American society, especially the scourge of slavery. Emerson, for example, felt that if each individual "lived truly, he would see truly," and therefore that the reformation of society had to start with the regeneration of the individual. Theodore Parker, on the other hand, fervently believed that societal wrongs had to be met

Civil Disobedience

Page 4

head-on, and was involved in supplying guns for John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, one of the catalysts of the Civil War. Those who subscribe to the *Higher Law* justification for civil disobedience are willing to tolerate unjust governmental activities, but only to a point. As Thoreau wrote in his essay *Civil Disobedience*:

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go; perchance it will wear smooth,— certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank; exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.

Natural Rights and *Human Rights* are not interchangeable terms. Madden explains that the concept of *Natural Rights* "involves an absolutist and rationalistic outlook in moral philosophy and is usually based on a theological foundation," whereas the idea of *Human Rights* "does not usually entail such conceptions but leaves open the possibility, at least, of relativistic, voluntaristic, and humanistic foundations for man's basic rights. The concept of human rights is the one usually used these days... because this concept includes many social and economic freedoms which seem important to our age." Nevertheless, continues Madden, these two concepts "still have a core of common meaning; namely, that there are certain rights which belong to a man independent of his position in a civil society. Since society does not bestow these rights, it cannot justifiably take them

away. This is the point in saying that such rights are *inalienable*." (Madden, 437)

Thoreau's Legacy:

Henry David Thoreau's legacy to those people of conscience who in the past 100 years have sought to resist civil government on moral and ethical grounds is immense. The uncompromising ideas he expressed with such transcendent power in the essay now called *Civil Disobedience* have been both the inspiration and blueprint for some of the world's great social activists. In September, 1962, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote from Albany, Georgia:

During my early college days I read Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience for the first time. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I re-read the work several times. I became convinced then that non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. No other person has been more eloquent and passionate in getting this idea across than Henry David Thoreau. As a result of his writings and personal witness we are the heirs of a legacy of creative protest. It goes without saying that the teachings of Thoreau are alive today, indeed, they are more alive today than ever before. Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a freedom ride into Mississippi, a peaceful protest in Albany, Georgia, a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, it is an outgrowth of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice.

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Civil Disobedience

Page 5

Deep Background for Teachers: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from the Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963

Dr. King had been arrested during an ongoing economic boycott and series of protests designed to break the back of segregation in perhaps the most segregated city in the United States at that time. Eight prominent Birmingham clergymen had published a statement criticizing Dr. King for the continuing civil disobedience which was wreaking an accumulating havoc in their community. As Dr. King himself states in his "Author's Note" at the beginning of the letter, published for wide circulation in his book *Why We Can't Wait* (Harper and Row, 1963), the letter's rough draft was actually written from his jail cell. In this letter, Dr. King sets forth his own justifications for civil disobedience, the definition of his version of civil disobedience, and the four basic steps to be followed in carrying forth such a campaign.

I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states, he wrote. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

He continues his justification for civil disobedience by stating, *There are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first one to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that an unjust law is no law at all.*

Now, continues Dr. King in his letter, what is the difference between the two? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.

Dr. King then defines his concept of civil disobedience: *In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law,...that would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty.... I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.*

In his letter Dr. King then states the means and steps involved in this concept of non-violent civil disobedience: *Nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek.... It is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends;... and it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends.*

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps—

- *Collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist;*
- *Negotiation;*
- *Self-Purification;*
- *Direct Action.*

Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.... We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.... Right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant.

While Dr. King was strongly influenced by Mohandas K. Gandhi's *Satyagraha* (truth and firmness); he, Gandhi, and the Transcendentalists of a century earlier were also guided by an even deeper Hindu belief in the inter-connectedness of all things with God and therefore with the basic goodness of every element and being of creation. From this belief came *dharma*, or the duty to respect all living things and to adhere to the just and righteous path; and from *dharma* evolved the concept of *ahimsa* (Sanskrit for do no harm).

The Hindus believe that adherence to *ahimsa* is a way to achieve harmony, peace, and compassion, and should be the bedrock of civil disobedience.

A. Bronson Alcott

Page One



At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1799, in Wolcott, Conn.
- ◆ Died: 1888
- ◆ Educator, Transcendentalist, Utopian, Lecturer, Writer, and Philosopher
- ◆ Abolitionist, Social Reformer
- ◆ Wrote *Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction* (1830).
- ◆ Operated progressive Temple School from 1834-1839 with the assistance of first, Elizabeth Peabody, and then, Margaret Fuller.
- ◆ One of the ten original members of the Transcendental Club, founded in 1836.
- ◆ *Orphic Sayings* published in the first issue of *The Dial* in July, 1840.
- ◆ Conducted utopian experiment at Fruitlands with family and like-minded associates in 1843.
- ◆ Moved his family to The Hillside in Concord, Mass., 1845.
- ◆ Moved into and began restoration of Orchard House in Concord in 1857, where daughter Louisa May Alcott wrote the novel *Little Women*.
- ◆ Became superintendent of schools in Concord in 1859.
- ◆ Founded Concord School of Philosophy in 1879, which he conducted every summer until his death in 1888.

In Depth...

Amos Bronson Alcott, after Emerson and Thoreau, was the most influential of the Transcendentalists and the movement's truest believer. His theories about the education of children were far ahead of their time, and while the controversies surrounding his schools in the 1830's caused their premature demise, his pioneering experiments in teaching small children were eventually vindicated and their effects far-reaching. He was an early proponent of the equal education of men and women, physical education for women, the education of African-Americans, and integrated schools. He insisted that children had as much to teach as to be taught. Though a loving father and faithful husband, he was not a good provider for his family, unwilling to compromise his values for material well-being, and often dependent on the good will of others, such as Emerson, for simple survival.

He was born in 1799 in Wolcott, Connecticut, and given the name Amos B. Alcox. Because his family was poor, he was denied a formal education and as a young man worked as a peddler in Virginia. Throughout his adult life, Alcott demonstrated a poor business acumen, and he made little monetary profit as a traveling salesman. Yet he had a brilliant mind and an intense intellectual curiosity, and he profited greatly from the access he was often given to plantation libraries. Alcott quickly discovered the writings of the great Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827).

According to Louise Antz, Pestalozzi "believed that society could be regenerated through education." (*Encyclopedia Americana*, volume 21, pages 788-789)

According to Pestalozzi, each child had a God-given potential, but this potential could only be realized if the child was nurtured, motivated, and received proper discipline. His most important book about teaching, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (1801), explained and demonstrated his theories about child development and education. He also established one of the earliest teacher-training institutes. (Ibid) Walter Harding adds that the Pestalozzian Method "centered on the physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being of the pupil rather than on the conventional teaching of facts."

(*Encyclopedia Americana*, volume one, page 519)

A. Bronson Alcott

Page 2

Alcott was also swayed by the Rationalist philosopher Robert Owen's book, *A New View of Society*, which stated that people are born empty or blank and therefore can be taught anything. (Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson, The Mind on Fire*, page 211)

Another influence on Alcott was Plato; in fact, according to Gay Wilson Allen, Alcott "was the most complete Platonic idealist of his time—at least in America." He also read thoroughly the writings of the English Romantic Samuel Taylor Coleridge. (*Waldo Emerson*, page 254)

The last major influences on Alcott were Socrates and the Gospels; moreover, more than one student of Alcott's life has written that Alcott tried to pattern his life on Christ's.

In the late 1820's and early 1830's Alcott opened a series of schools, honing and refining his teaching philosophy and methods. It was also at about this time that he changed his name from Alcox to Alcott. From the start, Alcott rejected the accepted teaching methods of the early 19th century; for example, he did not believe in corporal punishment. One famous anecdote often repeated in accounts of Alcott's life illustrates this belief. If a student misbehaved in his class, instead of caning the child, which was the accepted procedure at the time, Alcott called a class meeting, and all the students together would decide if the misbehaving child deserved punishment. If the class agreed that the child should be punished, *the miscreant was required to strike the teacher's hand with a ruler!*

The Temple School

In 1834 Alcott embarked on his most ambitious educational project, the Temple School in Boston. So-called because it was housed in a Masonic Temple, Alcott tried to make his schoolrooms both an inviting place for learning and for children. As Carlos Baker points out in his book *Emerson Among the Eccentrics*, the school did indeed have the look of a temple, "with its high-ceilinged rooms, one of which was lighted by a large Gothic window," and behind his desk was "a bas-relief of Jesus and a bust of Plato." (page 45) Baker adds that the school had "tasteful furniture, desks, chairs, books, tablets (paper and wood), cubes, cards, clock, 'hour-glass,' mirror,

boxes, vases. The four corners were ornamented with busts of Socrates, Shakespeare, Milton, and Sir Walter Scott.... Under the window he placed an Image of Silence.... (and) on his desk was a small sculpture of a child aspiring." (Ibid)

Alcott's first assistant at the Temple School was Elizabeth Peabody, who was later replaced by Margaret Fuller. Peabody's *Record of a School* (1835) and *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (1836), as well as Fuller's second volume of *Conversations*, present a fairly complete account of Alcott's operation of the school. Peabody was impressed with Alcott's methods, and her *Record* contains word-for-word accounts of his lessons.

Alcott disdained lecture and rote memorization for readings from the classics, the Gospels, hands-on experiences, and Socratic dialogue. He maintained that his aim was to stimulate thought and, in his own words, "awaken the soul." According to Baker, Alcott told Peabody that "every book read should be an event for the child." (*Emerson Among the Eccentrics*, page 46) He often concentrated on exploring with his students the meanings of single words. Baker reports that the word for February 4, 1835, was "birth." He began the exploration by quoting four lines from Wordsworth's "*Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, and then had this exchange with a ten-year-old pupil:

Alcott: "Have you had any degree of this change?"

Pupil: "Yes, and more in this last year than in all my life before."

Alcott then asked the entire class, "How many of you feel that the school-room is a different place from what it was the first day?"

The children replied, "We know more and think more. You know us, you have looked inside us. We behave better."

Alcott then told his class, "Knowledge is chaff of itself. But you have taken the knowledge and used it to govern yourself better. If I have thought I gave you knowledge only, and could not lead you to use it, I would never enter this schoolroom again." (Ibid, pages 47-48)

Emerson first met Alcott in Boston in 1835, and that same year read Peabody's *Record of a School*. He was greatly impressed by it. (Baker, 48)

A. Bronson Alcott

Page 3

This was the start of one of the most famous American friendships of the 19th-century, consisting of mutual affection, respect, and admiration. Of Alcott Emerson wrote, "His book is his school in which he writes all his thoughts." The Temple School had girls as well as boys, and one black student, supporting Alcott's stated belief in co-education and integration. (Richardson, 212-213) All in all, Alcott's pedagogical methods held great promise to reform education then and still resonate in today's primary schools.

Unfortunately, it was Alcott's innovative daring as a teacher which ultimately led to his, and his school's, undoing. Even some of his supporters, who had read Peabody's *Record of a School* in 1835, had reservations about some of his methods. Odell Shepard, in his biography of Alcott, reports that Dr. William Ellery Channing, one of the original supporters of the Temple School, wrote to Peabody, "I want light as to the degree to which the mind of the child should be turned inward. The soul is somewhat jealous of being watched, and it is no small part of wisdom to know when to leave it to its impulses and when to restrain it." (*Pedlar's Progress: The Life of Bronson Alcott*, page 173)

Alcott did not heed warning signs such as this one: on the contrary, he embarked on a decidedly bolder approach for the fall, 1835, school term. He had told his students, "I shall get people to come and tell you about many outward things, which I do not know much about myself. I can teach better about inward things. Next quarter I am going to teach you about inward things, not in yourselves, but in another—a Perfect Being. We will study Jesus Christ." (Baker, 48-49) Alcott did not teach religion in the traditional sense. He was not telling his students what to believe; rather, he was attempting to show them how to live, using Christ as the model. Furthermore, by exploring the Gospels with his students using the Socratic method, he was hoping to draw out of his students the intuitive insights and truths that he was convinced these children still held within, as yet uncorrupted by society's cynicism.

Elizabeth Peabody, as she had done before, kept an accurate record of Alcott's lessons, and Alcott insisted that it be published as soon as the term was finished. Despite Alcott's enthusiasm, Peabody was hesitant to publish this book, which was entitled

Conversations on the Gospels in Mr. Alcott's School (1836), because of the references to birth, circumcision, and sex. Alcott agreed to put these references in an appendix, but not expunge them. A second volume, by Margaret Fuller, his new assistant, appeared in 1837.

Alcott had expected the accounts to be well received, demonstrating just how high his head was set in the clouds. The reaction was almost uniformly negative, with the exception of Emerson, who defended his friend's methods and school, but to no avail. (Allen, 295)

The bad publicity doomed his cherished school. He lost many of his pupils, was forced to sell much of the school's equipment and furnishings, and had to move to the basement of the Masonic Temple. Alcott wrote, "My little room, with my ten pupils, and some remnants of my former magnificent mansion, with which it is a great contrast, gives me unquiet reflections." (Baker, 92) The school closed within two years.

The Transcendentalist

Transcendentalism was not a traditional movement or society with a set of rules for membership and what would today be called "action items," to be accomplished through organized activities by its members; on the contrary, one of its major tenets was the value of individual intuitive insight and follow-up action on those insights. They believed that each person had innate worth and a potential for greatness. Besides a belief in individualism and intuition, what bound the Transcendentalists together was a belief in a higher reality where Truth could be discovered. This higher, or *transcendent*, reality lay outside ordinary human experience, and could only be reached by relying on the genius each individual had within to connect with God, or, as Emerson was to call the Universal Being, the Oversoul.

"Every man is a revelation, and ought to write his record," Alcott once told Emerson. (Richardson, 212) At a meeting of the Transcendental Club he asserted that "Genius has two faces, one toward the infinite God, one towards men." (Baker, 89-90) And he had told his students at the Temple School, "All truth is within. My business is to lead you to find it in your own souls." (Shepard, 181)

A. Bronson Alcott

Page 4

One often-repeated and controversial exchange Alcott had with his pupils began with his asking, "You all appear to think that you have something within you godlike, spiritual, like Jesus, though not so much. And what is this?"

They replied, "Spirit, conscience"

Another student added, "Conscience is God within us." (Allen, 255-256)

The above passages, in brief, are the kernel of Transcendentalism—the importance and potential of the individual, the genius that connects each of us to God, and the assertion that truth lies within, and not without, the individual's soul.

Emerson was to say that, as far as Transcendentalism was concerned, Alcott had "one idea," and this idea was often repeated in Alcott's journals as well as his unpublished manuscript, *Psyche, or The Breath of Childhood*. This idea had to do with the relationship between Matter and Spirit, one of the major philosophical concerns of the Romantic Age. Alcott maintained that Spirit "is the sublime architect of Nature," and that Man was "the *chef d'oeuvre* of its art." He added that the Soul was "prior to the elements of Nature." (Baker, 49-52)

Robert Richardson, Jr., points out that "Religion was for Alcott the contemplation of spirit in its infinite being, science was for him the contemplation of spirit in external nature, while he understood the social and human sciences to start from contemplating spirit in ourselves and in our fellow human beings." (*Emerson, The Mind on Fire*, page 212)

Carlos Baker adds that "Unlike Edmerson, who gleaned ideas eclectically from the whole face of the globe, its literature and history, its many religions, its immense diversities of character and belief, Alcott was relatively impervious to 'notions' other than those of his own origination." (*Emerson Among the Eccentrics*, page 53)

Emerson had not only been impressed by Alcott the teacher, he was also influenced by Alcott the Transcendentalist. Echoes of Alcott's journals and manuscripts can be found in Emerson's seminal essay *Nature* (1836), which is generally considered to be the starting point of American Transcendentalism.

According to all sources, Alcott's greatest talent was conversation. It was in dialogue, as with Socrates, that his ideas found their most eloquent

expression. Emerson prized his many conversations with Alcott, discovering in them both reinforcement of his own previously formed ideas and inspiration for new ones.

Alcott, along with Emerson, was one of the original members of the Transcendental Club, which first met in 1836. One of the earliest meetings of the club, in fact, was at Alcott's house in Boston, and its topic was "American Genius—the causes which hinder its growth, and gives us no first rate productions." While each meeting was usually limited to a single topic, the club proved to be "a forum for new ideas, a clearinghouse, full of yeast and ferment, informal, open-ended..." (Richardson, 245-246) The club was relatively short lived, as were most of Transcendentalism's outward manifestations, such as *The Dial*, Fruitlands, Brook Farm, and Thoreau's stay at Walden Pond; yet the legacy of these attempts to look at and live life in a new way has been profound. For his part, Alcott never lost his idealism, and he was just as much the Transcendentalist in the 1880's as he was in the 1830's.

The Alcott Family and Fruitlands

Bronson Alcott was the scion of one of 19th-century America's most famous families, immortalized by daughter Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women* and its sequels. Published in 1868, the novel tells the story of the March family, always just one step ahead of poverty, yet able to withstand life's harsh realities by relying on mutual love and a strong moral center.

The Marches, of course, were the thinly disguised Alcotts; but the novel put the best face on a life that was in reality much grimmer for the Alcott family. Bronson Alcott, although a loving father and husband, was not a good provider. He had no head for finance, and his idealism continually clouded his judgment. He had married Abigail May in 1828, and it was this strong, remarkable woman, the "Marmee" of *Little Women*, who prevented the Alcott family from falling into dissolution. It is significant that in the novel the father plays at best a minor role and is often absent (for a substantial part of the narrative he is away fighting for the Union in the Civil War). Yet he is described as a model of

A. Bronson Alcott

Page 5

goodness, honor, and even nobility, and the March girls are constantly trying to live up to the high standards he and Marmee have set for them. Marmee, however, is the parent Jo, Beth, Meg, and Amy continually turn to for support and guidance, and she is the parent who disciplines them. It is she who also works at a regular job outside the home to put food on the table. The two older girls, Meg and Jo, also have to work to help support the family. It is telling that in the very first lines of the novel Louisa May Alcott chooses to describe the March family's dire straits:

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

"It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy, with an injured sniff.

"We've got Father and Mother and each other," said Beth contentedly from her corner.

(Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, page 3)

In reality, Bronson Alcott was not an absentee father. He played an active role in his four daughters' (Louisa, Anna, May, and Elizabeth) upbringing, putting into practice his theories of child-rearing and education. His wife Abigail supported and reinforced these methods, but she was the practical one who realized that bread was not manna that would miraculously fall from the heavens but had to be earned doing physical labor that would pay real money. Bronson was not averse to hard labor, as can be seen by his unflagging efforts to make a success of the Temple School. He also was an expert carpenter who did extensive remodeling work on the Concord houses—Hillside and Orchard House—his family occupied in the 1840's-1850's. He worked diligently in the house gardens, whose produce was often the main source of food for the family. But for Bronson Alcott, a regular job working for someone else was out of the question.

One of the Alcott family's great benefactors was Emerson, who on more than one occasion found them a place to live and Bronson a source of income. He also helped to retire Alcott's debts by exerting his considerable influence and personally out of his own pocket. Emerson believed that Alcott was well worth the investment, seeing in this gentle soul the new man with new ideas he felt America sorely needed.

In 1842 Emerson suggested that Alcott visit England, where a school based on the methods he had employed at the Temple School had been established by James Pierrepont Greaves. Greaves, who had read both the *Record of a School* and *Conversations on the Gospels*, had even named the school the Alcott House. Greaves was a vegetarian who believed in celibacy, and disapproved when two of his teachers, Charles Lane and Henry Wright, took wives. Emerson had offered to pay Alcott's expenses for the journey, and Alcott arrived in England in June, 1842. Greaves had died the previous March, and found the school under Wright's direction. There Alcott was hailed as the school's founding father and was delighted to see his educational methods being successfully applied. (Allen, 406-410)

In addition to his work as an educator, Alcott was a dedicated social activist. He was an ardent abolitionist and supporter of women's rights. He was also a utopian who believed it was possible for humanity to create a perfect society. In Book One of his treatise *Utopia* (1516), Sir Thomas More wrote, "So I reflect on the wise and sacred institutions of the Utopians, who are so well governed with so few laws. Among them virtue has its due reward, yet everything is shared equally and every man lives in plenty." (25) "Utopia" was a deliberately ironic title by More, because it is the Greek word for "nowhere." Alcott, however, did not take that apparent warning to heart, or discounted it, perhaps because much of what More wrote in his treatise was based on Alcott's beloved Plato. Alcott, still the naive dreamer, readily hatched a utopian scheme with his new-found allies Lane and Wright, who had since divorced their wives (Lane had had a son) and were now eager to emigrate to America. Emerson was dismayed that Alcott had returned from his England sojourn with two men who were if anything even more impractical than Alcott himself. Despite Emerson's stated reservations, Alcott and his utopian friends purchased a farm in Harvard, Massachusetts, about 16 miles west of Concord. Alcott named the place Fruitlands, out of his hope that the experiment would produce the ripe, sweet, fruit of a better life, and he moved his wife and four daughters to the commune in 1843.

From the beginning, the experiment was wrong-headed and based on faulty assumptions.

A. Bronson Alcott

Page 6

As Emerson recorded in his Journal, "This fatal flaw in the logic of our friends still appears: Their whole doctrine is spiritual, but they always end with saying. Give us much land & money....(Alcott) is a singular person, a natural Levite...But for a founder of a family or institution, I would as soon exert myself to collect money for a madman." (Allen, 411-412)

Fruitlands today is a lovely, peaceful place, a multi-faceted historical and cultural museum run by the estate of Clara Endicott Sears. From the ridge above the farmhouse, there is a panoramic view of mountains across the Nashua valley. The farmhouse is furnished as it was when the utopians, calling themselves the Con-Sociate Family, inhabited it. It is difficult for the visitor today to imagine the hardships the Family faced in 1843, hardships caused by faulty assumptions, planning, and implementation. Eleven-year-old Louisa May Alcott played on that ridge, as she recorded in one of her early diaries:

"September 1st—I rose at five and had my bath. I love cold water! Then we had our singing-lesson with Mr. Lane. After breakfast I washed dishes, and ran on the hill till nine, and had some thoughts,—it was so beautiful up there." (*Early Diary Kept at Fruitlands* by Louisa May Alcott) As an adult she would later give a humorous but fictional account of her family's experiences at Fruitlands in *Transcendental Wild Oats* (1874). As she had done with *Little Women*, she masked the hardships caused by her father's impracticality with typical Transcendentalist optimism and good will.

Lane, who had purchased the farm with his own funds, was fanatical about implementing James Pierpont Greave's dictates about celibacy and vegetarianism at Fruitlands. Animals could not be "enslaved" to do farmwork, all of which had to be done by manpower. (They compromised on this dictum.) Insects could not be "murdered." They could not use manure for fertilizer. They did not plant their crops until June, which was far too late. Then they neglected to weed and hoe. While Lane and Alcott were away visiting other experimental communities, an early frost ruined much of the crop, despite the efforts of Mrs. Alcott, her daughters, and Lane's son. Lane attempted to force Bronson and Abigail to sleep apart, which understandably caused bitter feelings. (Allen, 412-414)

The weather turned cold and harsh, food supplies dwindled, and the inhabitants of Fruitlands, especially the children, began to suffer greatly. By January, 1844, barely six months after it had begun, the experiment came to its dismal end. Lane took his son to live with the celibate Shakers. Alcott fell into a deep depression and resolved to starve himself. Abigail persuaded her husband to live for the love of his family, and her brother rescued the family by moving them to Still River. In 1844 Emerson helped to purchase for the Alcotts a house on Lexington Road in Concord. (Allen, 414) Bronson called this house Hillside, and it is the setting for much of *Little Women*. Sir Thomas More had been right, at least about Fruitlands; it had gone nowhere.

The Concord School of Philosophy

In 1857, the Alcotts moved into the Orchard House, which is just down Lexington Road toward Concord's town center from Hillside (which Nathaniel Hawthorne renamed The Wayside when his family replaced the Alcotts as tenants). Alcott joined and renovated the two buildings on the property. In 1859 he was appointed Superintendent of Concord's Public Schools, gaining vindication for his reputation as an educator.

In 1879 Orchard House was the venue for the first session of Alcott's Concord School of Philosophy, a project he had first conceived in 1840 with Emerson. This was one of America's earliest summer schools for adults. Julie Dapper, in her Orchard House booklet entitled *The Concord School of Philosophy* (1991), writes, "A milestone in the intellectual and cultural history of America, the Concord school encouraged the study of original creative thought, most significantly, Transcendentalism." (page 2) As could be expected, the morning and afternoon sessions were conducted using the Socratic method. The school was such a success that the Hillside Chapel was built behind Orchard House in 1880 to house the school. The building is still in use today. After Alcott suffered a stroke in 1882, he turned over leadership of the school to William Torrey Harris. Alcott attended the lectures and discussions whenever he could until he died in Boston in 1888. Louisa May Alcott died just two days later in the same house. The Concord

Margaret Fuller



"Each moment is an age between me, and the consummation of my existence."
Margaret Fuller's *Journal*, January, 1841

Page One

At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1810, Cambridgeport, Mass.
- ◆ Died: 1850, in shipwreck off coast of Fire Island, New York
- ◆ Transcendentalist, Feminist, Writer, Editor, Teacher.
- ◆ Meets Emerson in July, 1836.
- ◆ Teaches languages at Alcott's Temple School in 1836.
- ◆ Becomes Principal Teacher at the Greene Street School in Providence, R.I., in 1837.
- ◆ Begins first "Conversations" at Elizabeth Peabody's bookstore in Boston in 1839.
- ◆ Assumes editorship of the *Dial* in 1839; it premieres in 1840. Resigns in 1842.
- ◆ Continues "Conversations" from 1841-1844.
- ◆ *Summer on the Lakes* published in 1844; *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* published in 1845; and *Papers on Literature and Art* published, 1846.
- ◆ In Italy in 1847 she marries Giovanni Ossoli; gives birth to son Angelo in 1848.
- ◆ Directed hospital during French siege of Rome in 1849.
- ◆ *Special Correspondence of the Tribune* published in 1850.
- ◆ Dies with husband and son in wreck of the *Elizabeth* in 1850.

In Depth...

One of the most important women of her age, Margaret Fuller fulfilled the promise of the Transcendentalist life. She refused to submit to the limits placed upon women 150 years ago, taking to heart and fulfilling Emerson's dictum from his essay *Self-Reliance*,

"Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world."

The suffrage she desired entailed more than just the right to vote and to own property. She sought liberation from the entire spectrum of masculine hegemony in place in the nineteenth century.

Jeffrey Steele, in his introduction to *The Essential Margaret Fuller*, asserts that the death of her father in 1835 from cholera, though tragic, became her point of departure from the masculine world view. Timothy Fuller "was an affectionate but demanding parent who held Margaret, his oldest child, to an unusually high standard of intellectual and personal discipline...unique among women of her age, leaving her with the difficult challenge of balancing the demands of analytical rigor against the emotional necessities of her experience." (Page xii)

According to Steele, in 1840-1841 Fuller discovered what he describes as a "maternal realm," which "envisioned an economy based upon the 'free flow of life' and the interconnecton of friends," in contrast with Emerson's stoic self-reliance. ("Intro." xvii)

Her ultimate rejection of the masculine perspective in favor of a feminist set of constructs is in the truest sense Transcendental. She broke through the boundaries that had been set for women by male-dominated custom, law, and tradition and established new parameters of feminine experience, making her one of the fountainheads of American feminism.

Translator and Teacher

Understandably, Margaret Fuller first steered her prodigious intellect toward those disciplines which had been directly involved in her own education. Her father had seen to it that she had received a working knowledge of several European languages, so that she could read important works in the vernacular. She

Margaret Fuller

Page 2

quickly discovered the great German cosmopolitan Goethe. One of her earliest serious translations was of Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* in 1833. In 1839 she translated and published *Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe*. She published still another significant German translation in 1842. (Steele, *The Essential Margaret Fuller*, "Introduction" and "Chronology") Her skill as a translator, as it had been for Fuller's contemporary and fellow Transcendentalist Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, was a tool Fuller used to gain admittance to the male-ruled world of literature, philosophy, and the arts. America's educated elite craved translations of European literature and philosophy in its on-going attempt to escape its well-deserved provincial reputation, and Fuller's and Peabody's translations helped satisfy that craving.

Although she had attended a school for young women in Groton, Connecticut, in 1824-1825, most of her education had been supervised by her father, Timothy Fuller. As Fuller recounts in her *Autobiographical Romance*, written in 1840-1841 but not published until after her death:

My father was a man of business, even in literature; he had been a high scholar at college, and was warmly attached to all he had learned there, both from the pleasure he had derived in the exercise of his faculties and the associated memories of success and good repute.... He hoped to make me the heir of all he knew, and of as much more as the income of his profession enabled him to give me means of acquiring. At the very beginning, he made one great mistake, more common, it is to be hoped, in the last generation, than the warnings of the physiologists will permit it to be with the next. He thought to gain time, by bringing forward the intellect as early as possible. Thus I had tasks given me, as many and various as the hours would allow, and on subjects beyond my age; with the additional disadvantage of reciting to him in the evening, after he returned from his office. As he was subject to many interruptions, I was often kept up till very late; and as he was a severe teacher, both from his habits of mind and his ambition for me, my feelings were kept on the stretch till the recitations were over.... The consequence was a premature development of the brain, that made me a

"youthful prodigy" by day, and by night a victim of spectral illusions, nightmare, and somnambulism, which at the time prevented the harmonious development of my bodily powers and checked my growth, while, later, they induced continual headache, weakness, and nervous affections, of all kinds. (Steele, 26)

In the preceding passage can be found the seeds of Fuller's own educational philosophy—children should be allowed to develop at their own pace; the child's special needs as a child, and not as a small adult, should be paramount; and the child's physical as well as mental development should be accorded its due consideration. As with many teachers, who base their own teaching styles and methods on their most influential and beloved instructors, Fuller carried into her own teaching career her father's insistence on hard work and intellectual honesty, as well as her father's belief in the child's potential to master difficult skills and concepts. But her father's harsh influence was tempered by her professional association with another and far greater teacher—Bronson Alcott.

Alcott operated the Temple School in Boston from 1834 to 1839. It was a radical school for its time, in great part based on the theories of the Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827). According to Pestalozzi, each child had a God-given potential, but this potential could only be realized if the child were nurtured, motivated, and received consistent and loving discipline. The Pestalozzian Method included more than the mere teaching of facts, emphasizing the emotional and physical as well as intellectual needs of the child. (See article on *Bronson Alcott for more information about the basis for his educational philosophy and the Temple School.*) Fuller succeeded Elizabeth Peabody as Alcott's chief assistant at the school in 1836. Her belief that children could be treated as children and still be effectively taught was amply confirmed by Alcott's methods. Fuller, however, inadvertently contributed to the demise of the Temple School when she wrote the second volume of *Conversations on the Gospels in Mr. Alcott's School* in 1837, a controversial and often word-for-word account of his lessons which was published at Alcott's stubborn insistence.

In 1837, her work with Alcott led to her appointment as the Principal Teacher at the Greene Street School in Providence, Rhode Island. There she

Margaret Fuller

Page 3

put into practice her own brand of education, more enlightened than her father's, yet more down to earth than Alcott's.

The Transcendentalist

Margaret Fuller had long wanted to meet Emerson. She had heard him speak from the pulpit several times before she finally met him in July, 1836, the year he published his seminal essay *Nature*, which marks the beginning of Transcendentalism in America. According to Carlos Baker, in his book *Emerson Among the Eccentrics*, Emerson for his part had read one of her Goethe translations, and through the intermediary of Frederic Hedge, had made known his willingness to meet the young woman whose intellectual prowess was fast becoming legend. (Page 56)

At first, Fuller found in Emerson a supportive friend, father-figure, and kindred spirit. But as would happen with Thoreau, Fuller came to outgrow her dependence on Emerson's support and approval and developed her own perspective on the reality of her—and woman's—place in the universe. In this way, among others, she demonstrated the self-reliant individualism Emerson had urged his so-called "acolytes" to develop.

"And truly it demands something godlike in him who has cast off the common motives of humanity, and has ventured to trust himself for a taskmaster."

Emerson, *Self-Reliance*

The Dial—

In 1840, Margaret Fuller became the managing editor of a new periodical, which was named, after Bronson Alcott's suggestion, *The Dial*. According to Gay Wilson Allen, in his book *Waldo Emerson*, Alcott hoped "that the magazine would measure the progress of thought." (Page 357) Ideas and plans for this magazine had been under discussion for some time by members of the Transcendental Club, including Emerson, Fuller, Alcott, Frederic Henry Hedge, Elizabeth Peabody, and others. By this time, Fuller's standing among the Transcendentalists was so great that Emerson insisted that she edit the quarterly magazine, and no objections were raised by any of the others in the circle. Elizabeth Peabody was later to become the periodical's publisher. This is a telling example of the openness

of the Transcendentalists towards women. In the strict sense of the word, only a few, such as Theodore Parker, Alcott, Fuller, and Peabody, could rightly be labeled feminists; but the Transcendentalists were not hypocrites, and they sincerely believed in the potential of all human beings, male and female, black and white, Christian and non-Christian, rich and poor. This potential, according to Emerson, stemmed from the Over-Soul, who was the Universal and Supreme Being, present from birth in the souls of all people.

The first issue of *The Dial* was published on July 1, 1840, after months of intensive evaluation and editing of manuscripts by Fuller with the assistance of Emerson. Emerson called their correspondence "Dialing." (Allen, 357) This premier issue contained contributions by Fuller, Emerson, Alcott, George Ripley, Theodore Parker, and Henry David Thoreau, still five years from his move to Walden Pond.

In a letter to his friend, great English historian and thinker Thomas Carlyle, Emerson wrote of this first issue, "Our community begin to stand in some terror of Transcendentalism, and the *Dial*, poor little thing, whose first number contains scarce anything considerable or even visible, is just now honored by attacks from almost every newspaper and magazine...." (Allen, 359) *The Dial*, despite Emerson's deprecating words about its first edition, lasted for four years. Emerson himself edited the quarterly from 1842 until it ceased publication in 1844. *The Dial's* contribution to Transcendentalism was invaluable in that it gave an audience to those in the "Newness" who had heretofore been unknown outside of their small circle. Moreover, many of the contributions to the magazine had then and still have today profound literary merit and provide a record of Transcendentalist thought and attitudes beyond the familiar writings of Emerson and Thoreau. Besides articles about Transcendentalism, the periodical included essays about the major issues of the day, book reviews, and poetry.

Fuller was to continue her editorship of *The Dial* until the spring of 1842, when she resigned, citing fatigue. At the same time she was working on her *Autobiographical Romance*, several translations, and a project she had started several years earlier, even before *The Dial*— her "Conversations" at Elizabeth Peabody's bookshop in Boston.

Margaret Fuller

Page 4

The Conversations—

Margaret Fuller began her famous series of lectures and seminars for and about women in Elizabeth Peabody's Boston bookstore in 1839. Fuller called these symposia "Conversations," and their topics were wide ranging. For example, the first seminar's topic was "Greek Mythology," the one in 1840 was about "Fine Arts," in 1841 it was "Ethics," followed by symposia on religion, education, and women in 1842, and "Education" again in 1843. The last of the "Conversations" were conducted in 1844. (Steele, "Chronology," iv-lvii)

Van Wyck Brooks, in his important (and entertaining) book, *The Flowering of New England*, provides a lively account of these "Conversations:"

She (Margaret Fuller) had never questioned her own vocation, and she was just on the verge of 30 when, towards the end of 1839, she opened her "Conversations" in the West Street house (of Elizabeth Peabody). It was on a Saturday, at noon, her regular weekly hour. She appeared, with a regal air, with various books of reference on her arm and a huge bouquet of chrysanthemums....She liked to see the effects of her mental efforts, and the Saturday classes in West Street were responsive. Half the feminine elite were there, Elizabeth Hoar from Concord, Lydia Maria Child, the three Peabody sisters, Mrs. Emerson, Mrs. George Bancroft, Mrs. Theodore Parker, Maria White, who was engaged to James Russel Lowell....Margaret had the true Boston passion for pigeon-holes and categories, for putting everything in its proper place....It was all sharp and clear, like so many definitions from a legal treatise, ready to be gathered in a notebook. Margaret's ideas had good square corners, like building blocks that fitted at the edges. Set side by side, in just the right arrangement, they formed a solid architectural structure, a true temple of culture, as unmistakable as a Boston bank."

—(Pages 237 and 241)

Zenobia & the Anti-Transcendentalist—

Discussion of Margaret Fuller's influence as a Transcendentalist cannot be closed without mention of Nathaniel Hawthorne's portrayal of her as Zenobia, the leader of a Transcendentalist utopian communal experiment, in *The Blithedale*

Romance. Hawthorne, the great author of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, among many other romances and tales, had participated in the Transcendentalist Brook Farm utopian experiment at West Roxbury, Massachusetts, for about eight months in 1841. He hoped that residence at the commune would provide both the basics of food and shelter and the opportunity to write unimpeded by the concerns of ordinary daily life. He was also a fair-minded man, and he wanted to see for himself if the "Newness" of Transcendentalism extolled by Emerson, Alcott, and others was more than merely pie-in-the-sky idealism. Hawthorne soon discovered that the arduous physical farm labor required of him during the day made it difficult for him to write at night. In addition, the young and vibrant members of the Brook Farm commune loved to socialize and dance after supper, and these distractions doomed Hawthorne's attempts at serious composition. His Puritan heritage had always been a strong influence on him. In his 1837 tale entitled *The May-Pole of Marymount*, Hawthorne had written a detailed account of hedonistic revelers being punished by Puritans, and though he would not have wished such a fate for the Brook Farm participants, he did not approve of such frivolity when their avowed purpose for being there was much more sober and serious.

He left Brook Farm with a jaundiced view of Transcendentalism, which only grew more acute over the years. Today Hawthorne is considered one of the two major anti-Transcendentalists from that time. The other is his close friend Herman Melville, the author of *Moby-Dick*. Hawthorne had written to another friend, "When I write another romance, I shall take the Community for a subject, and shall give some of my experiences and observations at Brook Farm." (Malcolm Bradbury, "Introduction," *The Blithedale Romance*, xxix) In 1852 Hawthorne published *The Blithedale Romance*.

On one level, Hawthorne's romance is a critical appraisal of the Brook Farm experiment. The historical Zenobia was a queen of ancient Palmyra. Many of Hawthorne's readers would have been familiar with the allusion because of a popular historical romance by William Ware which had been published in 1838 entitled *Zenobia, or, The Fall of an Empire*, which dealt with the trials of the early Christians.

Margaret Fuller

Page 5

Miles Coverdale, Hawthorne's narrator who is in some ways Hawthorne himself, tells us at the end of chapter two that Zenobia was not the commune leader's real name, but one "*she had assumed...as her magazine signature; and as it accorded well with something imperial which her friends attributed to this lady's figure and deportment, they, half-laughingly, adopted it in their familiar discourse with her. She took the appellation in good part, and even encouraged its constant use, which, in fact, was thus far appropriate, that our Zenobia— however humble looked her new philosophy— had as much native pride as any queen would have known what to do with.*" (Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, page 14)

Toward the close of chapter three Coverdale states his clearly negative initial impression of the Blithedale utopians:

"...the presence of Zenobia caused our heroic enterprise to show like an illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counterfeit Arcadia, in which we grown-up men and women were making a play-day of the years that were given us to live in." (Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, pages 20-21)

This motif that the characters in the narrative are play-acting, are not what they seem, consistently repeats itself and leads to the realization that Hawthorne intends a deeper meaning. Zenobia and the other utopians are supposedly searching for a transcendental truth, but they ironically, even hypocritically, refuse to face the harsh truths of their individual lives and the stark realities of 1840's America in general. This refusal leads to Zenobia's tragic downfall, and is an allegorical parallel to Margaret Fuller's own fate.

Feminist, Reporter, and Reformer

Today, Margaret Fuller's reputation rests increasingly on her persistent efforts to improve the lot of the powerless in mid-nineteenth century American society; namely, women, slaves, and the poor. The main conduit for her social activism was writing, and her major work has proven to be the feminist tract *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Originally a long article in an 1843 issue of the *Dial* entitled *The Great Lawsuit*, Fuller expanded it and published the book-length version in 1845. Fuller

makes clear in the *Preface* that the book's purpose is not the elevation of women at the expense of men; rather, its aim is to show that by granting women their proper place in society, both sexes will mutually benefit:

By Man I mean both man and woman; these are two halves of one thought. I lay no especial stress on the welfare of either. I believe that the welfare of the one cannot be effected without that of the other. My highest wish is that truth should be distinctly and rationally apprehended, and the conditions of life and freedom recognized as the same for the daughters and the sons of time; twin exponents of a divine thought. (Margaret Fuller, *Preface, Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, from Jeffrey Steele's *The Essential Margaret Fuller*, page 245.)

She did not claim that men and women were the same and therefore should be treated in the same way, but that men and women were equal and should have equal rights and protection under the laws of the state and in the conduct of everyday life. If this were to happen, Fuller wrote, "there would be unison in variety, congeniality in difference." (Steele, 272) Sounding this theme again and again, she states:

"Harmony exists in difference, no less than in likeness, if only the same key-note govern both parts....Nature seems to delight in varying the arrangements, as if to show that she will be fettered by no rule, and we must admit the same varieties that she admits." (288) And still later she adds:

"Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman....Let us be wise and not impede the soul. Let her work as she will. Let us have one creative energy, one incessant revelation. Let it take what form it will, and let us not bind it by the past to man or woman, black or white. Jove sprang from Rhea, Pallas from Jove. So let it be." (310-311)

It is here, in her concept of a "great radical dualism," that she transcends Emerson. At best, Emerson was ambivalent about the role of women, even though throughout his life he was in close, even intimate, contact with strong, self-reliant females. Yet, it was in following Emerson's dictum to

Margaret Fuller

Page 6

"absolve you to yourself" that she gained "the suffrage of the world."

Nevertheless, she was both clear and adamant in what she wanted for women:

"We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have every path laid open to woman as freely as to man. Were this done and a slight temporary fermentation allowed to subside, we should see crystallizations more pure and of more various beauty. We believe the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown in the history of former ages, and that no discordant collision, but a ravishing harmony of the spheres would ensue.

"Yet, then and only then, will mankind be ripe for this, when inward and outward freedom for woman as much as for man shall be acknowledged as a right, not yielded as a concession. As the friend of the negro assumes that one man cannot by right, hold another in bondage, so should the friend of woman assume that man cannot, by right, lay even well-meant restrictions on woman. If the negro be a soul, if the woman be a soul, appareled in flesh, to one Master only are they accountable. There is but one law for souls, and if there is to be an interpreter of it, he must come not as man, or son of man, but as son of God." (260-261)

Fuller was an abolitionist, and believed that both the South's slaves and the North's so-called "free" women held a certain kinship. She was especially horrified at the widespread stories of the abuse of female slaves, and found a connection of their victimization with the plight of prostitutes in Northern cities. Fuller felt that prostitution was in essence white slavery, and fought for its abolition as well.

At the end of 1844 Horace Greeley hired Fuller as a book reviewer and columnist for the *New-York Daily Tribune*. She wrote on a wide variety of topics, but she was most forceful in exposing the plight of the poor and the exploitation of women. She visited and wrote about poor houses, insane asylums, orphanages, and women's prisons. In a March 19, 1845, article she wrote about a tour she took of city charities:

"The pauper establishments that belong to a great city take the place of the skeleton at the

banquets of old. They admonish us of stern realities, which must bear the same explanations as the frequent blight of Nature's bloom. They should be looked at by all, if only for their own sakes, that they may not sink listlessly into selfish ease, in a world so full of disease. They should be looked at by all who wish to enlighten themselves as to the means of aiding their fellow-creatures in any way, public or private. For nothing can really be done till the right principles are discovered, and it would seem they still need to be discovered or elucidated, so little is done, with a great deal of desire in the heart of the community to do what is right." (*The Essential Margaret Fuller*, 385)

She was gradually drawn toward the incipient Socialism of the 1840's as a possible system that could "elucidate the right principles" for reform, and she looked toward Europe, at that time rife with revolutionary ferment, as the place where those principles could be tested.

In 1846 she left America for Europe, continuing her work for Greeley as a foreign correspondent. She eventually found herself in Italy, where she met and fell in love with the political activist Giovanni Ossoli. In 1848 she and Ossoli had a son, Angelo. Caught up in the political turmoil and revolution which ravaged Rome, she worked in a hospital full of war-wounded while Ossoli manned the barricades. At about this time they married, and after the fall of Rome they moved to Florence. In 1850, she and her family sailed for America. Their ship, the *Elizabeth*, became caught in a hurricane off the coast of Fire Island, New York, and was wrecked. Angelo's body was recovered, but not those of Margaret and Ossoli.

A compilation of her foreign correspondence for the *New York Herald-Tribune* had been published earlier that year; but she had completed another manuscript, this one about the revolutions in Italy, that promised to be her most important political tract. Its importance was such that Emerson dispatched Thoreau to the scene of the shipwreck in search of the manuscript. Thoreau found only fragments of clothing and her broken desk. Her last manuscript had been lost. (Baker, 313-314) The *Herald-Tribune* reported the tragedy and what were reputedly Fuller's last words: "I see nothing but death before me. I shall never reach the shore." (Baker, 309)



George Ripley and Brook Farm

Page 1

George Ripley At a Glance:

- ◆ Born: Greenfield, Mass., 1802
- ◆ Died: 1880
- ◆ Unitarian Minister, Utopian, Reformer, Editor, Writer, and Critic
- ◆ Graduated from Harvard in 1823.
- ◆ Pastor of the Purchase Street Unitarian Church, Boston, 1825-1841.
- ◆ Edited *The Christian Register* while at the Purchase Street Church.
- ◆ First Meeting of the Transcendental Club Held at Ripley's Home in Boston, 1836; a Founding Member.
- ◆ Published *Discourses on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1836.
- ◆ Edited *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature* from 1838 to 1852.
- ◆ Principal Founder, along with his wife, Sarah Ripley, of the Brook Farm Utopian Community in 1841.
- ◆ Assumed the Debts of the Defunct Brook Farm Association Upon the Community's Collapse in 1846.
- ◆ Edited *The Harbinger*, the Journal of the Brook Farm Community, 1840's.
- ◆ Literary Critic for *The New York Tribune*, starting in 1849; Helped Elevate Literary Criticism to an Accepted Field of Literature in its Own Right.
- ◆ A Founding Editor of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 1850.
- ◆ Published *History of Literature and the Fine Arts*, 1852; co-authored by Bayard Taylor.
- ◆ Started Publication of the *New American Cyclopaedia* in 1858.

Brook Farm at a Glance:

- ◆ A Utopian Community from 1841 to 1846 which was founded first on the principles of Transcendentalism, and, later, based on Fourierism. Its original purpose was to combine physical labor with intensive education.
- ◆ Established on a 200-acre farm at West Roxbury, Mass., near Boston.
- ◆ Founded by George and Sarah Ripley and other Transcendentalists, and inspired in part by the great Unitarian William Ellery Channing.
- ◆ Nathaniel Hawthorne is among the original subscribers and participants, who joins the community in 1841.
- ◆ Both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau refuse to join the community as residents, although Emerson visits and lectures there.
- ◆ Hawthorne withdraws after a stay of less than eight months, disillusioned with the commune; his experiences at Brook Farm provide the foundation for *The Blithedale Romance*, which is published in 1852.
- ◆ Margaret Fuller is a frequent visitor; she becomes one of the inspirations for the character of Xenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*.
- ◆ The teachings of French philosopher Charles Fourier eventually come to dominate the commune after the arrival of Albert Brisbane in 1843.
- ◆ Brook Farm's central building, the Phalanstery, burns down in 1846.
- ◆ Brook Farm disbands in 1847.

George Ripley and Brook Farm



Page 2

George Ripley in Depth:

How can a person remain an individual in the midst of society, which for its own survival must demand conformity? This is one of the classic American dilemmas, and George Ripley sought heroically to find a satisfactory resolution. As did Emerson before him, Ripley resigned his ministry because he felt that Unitarianism was too constraining for the Transcendentalist. But unlike Emerson, Ripley came to believe that the individual cannot afford to stand alone and wait “for the world to come round to him.” The Panic of 1837 (what we would today call a Depression) and the advent of the Industrial Revolution foretold the harsh treatment the lone individual could expect from the forces of unbridled capitalism. The middle way he found was what today would be called communitarianism. He believed that people could only maintain their individuality by banding together in a communal effort to provide each with the necessities for a dignified physical existence while at the same time giving each the opportunity to explore the inner reaches of his or her own individual genius. This was the purpose of Brook Farm, which he founded with his wife Sarah in 1841.

After the collapse of Brook Farm in 1847, Ripley dedicated himself to paying off the debts incurred by the commune. In 1849 he became the literary critic for the *New York Tribune*. He helped found *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1850, and with Bayard Taylor published *History of Literature and the Fine Arts* in 1852. Ripley thus was instrumental, along with Edgar Allan Poe, James Russell Lowell, and Margaret Fuller, in establishing the genre of literary criticism.

A firm believer in the dissemination of knowledge, he started publication of the *New American Cyclopaedia* in 1858.

Brook Farm in Depth:

The middle of the 19th century was a time of ferment and experimentation. Many Americans were following Emerson's dictum not to “dwell among the dry bones of the past,” relishing the liberating “Newness” of Transcendentalism, feminism, and even the first stirrings of socialism in the form of utopian communal experiments such as Brook Farm. It was this quest for the new and the liberating that ultimately led to Brook Farm's demise.

The Ripleys established the commune on a dairy farm in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1841 as the Institute of Agriculture and Education. They were practical as well as idealistic, requiring investment in the Institute at the substantial rate of \$500 per share. Elizabeth Peabody published the prospectus for the Institute in *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist periodical. Besides the farm, a comprehensive school was established for the children. Not surprisingly, the children were also expected to help with the farm chores. Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller all declined to reside at Brook Farm, though they were frequent visitors. Besides Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Ripleys, other notable residents of the community were Theodore Parker, Charles A. Dana, George Bradford, William Henry Channing, and George William Curtis.

Albert Brisbane came to Brook Farm in 1843, bringing with him the radical beliefs of the French socialist Charles Fourier (1772-1837). Fourierism—which holds that people can live full and happy lives only when the constraints placed upon the gratification of desire have been eliminated—quickly came to dominate the commune, which changed its name to the Brook Farm Phalanx. This was a major step away from Emersonian philosophy. In 1846 the Phalanstery, or main building, burned, signalling the end of this particular attempt at creating an American utopia.

Convers Francis



At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1795, Metonomy, Mass.
- ◆ Died: 1863
- ◆ Unitarian Minister, Transcendentalist, Educator.
- ◆ Brother of Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880), famous writer and social activist.
- ◆ Graduated Harvard, 1815; Ordained Minister, 1819.
- ◆ Married Abby Bradford Allyn in 1822.
- ◆ Minister in Watertown, Mass., from 1819-1842.
- ◆ Succeeded Henry Ware, Jr., as Professor of Pulpit Eloquence and Pastoral Care at Harvard Divinity School in 1842.
- ◆ Attends the first meeting of the Transcendental Club in 1836.
- ◆ Friend and Correspondent of Ralph Waldo Emerson.
- ◆ An early American student of German language and literature, with a concentration on religious texts.
- ◆ Wrote *Errors in Education*, in 1828.
- ◆ Gave the Dudlean Lecture at Cambridge in 1833.
- ◆ Contributed articles about John Eliot (1836) and Sebastian Rale (1845) to Jared Sparks's *Library of American Biography*.

In Depth...

Although one of the lesser-known Transcendentalists, Convers Francis was nevertheless a notable part of the tapestry that comprised American Idealism in the 1830's and 1840's. He was an original member of the Transcendental Club, also called the Hedge Club or the Symposium. A Unitarian minister, like Frederic Hedge he was able to reconcile the religion he practiced with the idealism that he felt provided important answers to the nature of reality and humanity's place in that reality. He was also an influential teacher.

According to Harris Elwood Starr, Francis was "one of the first in America to apply himself to a sedulous study of the German language and literature, especially in the religious field, and was a veritable encyclopedia of information regarding them." (*Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. III, page 577*) His expertise in this field proved to be a valuable resource to Emerson, Alcott, and other participants in the Symposium. Robert D. Richardson, Jr., describes Francis as "a moderate Unitarian, a liberal trusted by most radicals and most conservatives. For his diplomatic skills and his seniority (he was one of the oldest of the youthful group of Transcendentalists, at the time being all of 41) he was chosen moderator of the new club." (*Emerson, The Mind on Fire, page 248*)

He was a friend and correspondent of Emerson's. Gay Wilson Allen notes that in his diary Francis records spending the night at Emerson's Concord home in 1838, during the furor over Emerson's Divinity School Address, which resulted in Emerson's being banned from speaking at Harvard for 30 years. While Francis himself disagreed with some of what Emerson told the Divinity School students on that fateful day, he was able to go beyond Emerson's words and comprehend his intentions: "He is a true godful man; though in his love for the ideal he disregards too much the actual." (*Waldo Emerson, page 319*)

In 1842, Francis succeeded Henry Ware, Jr., as Professor of Pulpit Eloquence and Pastoral Care at the Harvard Divinity School. He was, therefore, arguably the most important religious educator in America before the Civil War. He held the position until his death in 1863.

Frederic Henry Hedge

"In self-culture lies the ground and condition of all culture."



At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1805, Cambridge, Mass.
- ◆ Died: 1890
- ◆ Unitarian Minister; Transcendentalist; Early Translator of Kant and Hegel; Early American Exponent of Swedenborg; Teacher and Poet.
- ◆ Considered an infant prodigy, he reputedly memorizes Virgil's *Aeneid* at age seven.
- ◆ One of the first advocates of what came to be known as Transcendentalism, his first article on the subject, appearing in 1833, predates Emerson's *Nature* by three years.
- ◆ A founding member of the Transcendental Club in 1836 (often called by Emerson the Hedge Club, because it usually met when Hedge was Boston).
- ◆ His poem *Questionings* appears in the January, 1841, issue of the *Dial*.
- ◆ Hedge reconciles Transcendentalism with Unitarianism and remains a lifelong clergyman, eventually becoming the denomination's President.
- ◆ Major Writings include *Prose Writers of Germany* (1848); *Reason in Religion* (1865); *Ways of the Spirit and Other Essays* (1877); and *Atheism in Philosophy* (1884).

In Depth...

Unlike Emerson, who renounced his ministry in the face of his new-found Idealism, Frederic Henry Hedge was able to reconcile Unitarianism with Transcendentalism and remained a minister his entire adult life. His influence on Unitarianism was substantial, eventually becoming the denomination's President.

Reverend Samuel A. Trumbore, in his sermon *Frederic Henry Hedge: The Man in the Middle* (Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Charlotte County, April 28, 1996) asserts that "It was Dr. Hedge who brought to the Transcendentalist movement the expertise in German Idealism as a scholar of German literature....A man of towering intellect, Dr. Hedge interpreted (Kant, Schelling, and Hegel) within the uniqueness of the American experience, laying the groundwork for this thought to take root on American soil." (Pages 3-4) Trumbore adds that "Dr. Hedge felt that the development of the self was the most important contribution one could make to society." (Page 5)

Emerson himself recognized Hedge's importance to American Romanticism. The Transcendental Club was called by Emerson the Hedge Club, not only because it usually only met when Hedge, whose congregation was in Maine, visited Boston, but also because of Hedge's steadying influence and insightful contributions. According to Gay Wilson Allen, in his biography *Waldo Emerson* (Penguin Books, 1981), "Hedge had suggested forming a discussion club, and on the nineteenth (of September, 1836) the second meeting of what would become known as the 'Transcendental Club' met at George Ripley's house in Boston." (Page 284)

In 1833 Hedge published an article in *The Christian Examiner* on Samuel Taylor Coleridge and German Idealism. This article predated Emerson's seminal *Nature* by three years. Robert D. Richardson, Jr., in *Emerson, The Mind on Fire* (University of California Press, 1995) asserts, "If there is a single moment after which American transcendentalism can be said to exist, it is when Emerson read Hedge's manifesto...the essay as a whole is far superior in intellectual energy and grasp to anything Emerson himself had yet written." (Page 165)

Questionings by Frederic Henry Hedge

*Hath this world, without me wrought,
Other substance than my thought?
Lives it by my sense alone,
Or by essence of its own?
Will its life, with mine begun,
Cease to be when that is done,
Or another consciousness
With the self-same forms impress?*

*Doth yon fireball, poised in air,
Hang by my permission there?
Are the Clouds that wander by,
But the offspring of mine eye,
Born with every glance I cast,
Perishing when that is past?
And those thousand, thousand eyes,
Scattered through the twinkling skies,
Do they draw their life from mine,
Or, of their own beauty shine?*

*Now I close my eyes, my ears,
And creation disappears;
Yet if I but speak the word,
All creation is restored.
Or— more wonderful— within,
New creations do begin;
Hues more bright and forms more rare,
Than reality doth wear,
Flash across my inward sense,
Born of the mind's omnipotence.*

*Soul! That all informest, say!
Shall these glories pass away?
Will those planets cease to blaze,
When these eyes no longer gaze?
And the life of things be o'er,
When these pulses beat no more?*

*Thought! That in me works and lives,—
Life to all things living gives,—
Art thou not thyself, perchance,
But the universe in trance?
A reflection inly flung
By that world thou fanciedst sprung
From thyself;— thyself a dream;—
Of the world's thinking thou the theme.*

*Be it thus, or be thy birth,
From a source above the earth—
Be thou matter, be thou mind,
In thee alone myself I find,
And through thee alone, for me,
Hath this world reality.
Therefore, in thee will I live,
To thee all myself will give,
Losing still, that I may find,
This bounded self in boundless Mind.*

Questions

- 1) In your own words, state the basic question posed by Hedge in this poem.
- 2) How does Hedge himself answer this question?
- 3) How would you have answered Hedge's question?
- 4) Explain how *Questionings* is an Idealistic poem.
- 5) Why is the use of couplets appropriate in this poem?
- 6) Scan the poem for its basic rhythm by identifying both the meter and the number of metrical feet in each line.
- 7) Identify the caesuras in the third, fifth and sixth stanzas. What is their purpose?
- 8) Do you think this rhythm adds to or detracts from the overall effect of the poem? Explain.

Theodore Parker



Page One

At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1810, Lexington, Mass.
- ◆ Died: 1860, of tuberculosis in Florence, Italy.
- ◆ Clergyman, lecturer, writer, editor, reformer, supporter of women's rights, abolitionist, major supporter of John Brown.
- ◆ Largely self-educated, briefly attended Harvard Divinity School, ordained Unitarian minister.
- ◆ Rejected basic Unitarian doctrines but refused to resign the ministry. His sermon *On the Transient and Permanent in Christianity* (1841), was the first pronouncement of his radical religious beliefs.
- ◆ Started preaching at the large Twenty Eighth Congregational Society in Boston in 1845.
- ◆ Member of the Transcendental Club; contributor to *The Dial*.
- ◆ Editor of the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, 1848-1850.
- ◆ Became active in the Underground Railroad; wrote anti-slavery tract *Letter to the People of the United States Touching the Matter of Slavery* in 1848.
- ◆ Member of the Secret Six Committee that funded John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in 1859.

In Depth...

More than any of the other Transcendentalists—Emerson, Alcott, Fuller, even Thoreau—Theodore Parker lived the Transcendentalist life. He believed in the worth of the individual regardless of race or sex, and had no hesitancy in those beliefs, as Emerson hesitated in the equality of women. He was one of the foremost orators of his day, attracting hundreds to his Sunday sermons for the Twenty Eighth Congregational Society held at the Melodeon in Boston in the 1840's and 1850's. During his lifetime he was much more well known and influential than Thoreau. Parker's fervent abolitionism led him to support John Brown with deeds as well as words. He was one of the Secret Six Committee that helped to fund Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859, one of the catalysts of the Civil War.

As William B. Cairns, in his *A History of American Literature* (1912), points out, "He had the power which belongs to a self-educated man with a vast store of facts which he can command and use at will....He was an attractive and forceful man, able and sincere, and he contributed something to the development of religious thought." (Pages 249-250)

The Unitarian Minister

Unitarianism, founded in reaction against the Calvinist doctrines of the 17th and 18th centuries, by the mid-19th century was coming under attack because to some the mixture of rationalism and spiritualism was not spiritually satisfying. Emerson had renounced his Unitarian ministry because he felt that the religion was lifeless. According to Catherine Rivard, in her informative booklet *American Transcendentalism, A Brief Overview*, Parker "found Unitarianism cold and formal, appealing to the mind but not the heart." (Page 16) In 1841 Theodore Parker expressed his dissatisfaction with Unitarianism as it was then constituted in his sermon *On the Transient and Permanent in Christianity*. In it, Parker maintained that there existed a difference between what Jesus had originally taught and the forms, doctrines, and denominations that had evolved over the past 18 centuries. According to Parker, these religious practices were transient, while Christ's original teachings were permanent. He asked, "Why need we accept the commandment of men as the doctrine of

Theodore Parker

Page 2

God?" He added, "It is not so much by the Christ who lived so blameless and beautiful eighteen centuries ago that we are saved directly, but by the Christ we form in our hearts and live out in our daily life that we save ourselves." (Carlos Baker, *Emerson Among the Eccentrics*, pages 202-203)

The reaction to the sermon was harsh, and the Unitarian establishment called for his defrocking; but Parker refused to back down. In his 1842 lecture *Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* he elaborated on humanity's relationship with God. Parker said that this relationship could be examined in three ways: Rationalistic, Anti-Rationalistic, and Natural-Religious. Parker asserted that the Natural-Religious view was the correct one: "As we have bodily senses to lay hold on matter and supply bodily wants...so we have spiritual faculties to lay hold on God, and supply spiritual wants.... We have direct access to (God) through Reason, Conscience, and the religious sentiment, just as we have direct access to nature through the eye, the ear, or the hand. Through these channels, and by means of a law, certain, regular, and universal as gravitation, God inspires man." (Baker, 204)

Emerson, as would be expected, was sympathetic and supportive of his fellow Transcendentalist's stand. His own *Divinity School Address* (1838) had scandalized the Unitarian establishment and had caused his de facto banishment from Harvard. Unlike Emerson, however, Parker refused to resign the ministry; instead, he sought to infuse Unitarianism with a renewed spiritual spark. In 1845 he was invited to be the chief preacher at the newly formed Twenty Eighth Congregational Society. His eloquent and substantial sermons were the main reason the Society's membership grew to more than 7000.

Robert D. Richardson, in his 1995 biography *Emerson, the Mind on Fire*, states: "In religion transcendentalism teaches that the religious spirit is a necessary aspect of human nature—or of the human condition—and that the religious spirit does not reside in external forms, words, ceremonies, or institutions." (Page 250) Theodore Parker helped to imbue Transcendentalism with that religious spirit.

Parker, however, did not hesitate to use his "bully pulpit" for purposes other than religion, speaking out repeatedly on women's rights, prison reform, poverty, and especially the abolition of slavery.

The Transcendentalist and Self-Taught Scholar

Catherine Rivard states, "Parker was called by some the most articulate of the transcendentalists, particularly good at applying spiritual standards to secular issues, for he was a great believer in the authority of Conscience over the State." (*American Transcendentalism, An Overview*, page 16) His unstinting devotion to just about every reform movement of the ante-bellum era was Transcendentalism put to work.

A member of the Transcendental Club, Parker contributed spiritual and social insights to the discussion sessions that included some of the finest American minds of the time. He was also a major contributor to *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist periodical edited first by Margaret Fuller and then by Emerson in the early 1840's.

Despite his lack of formal education, he stood in the same intellectual circle as Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Channing, and Fuller. He was conversant in 20 languages and a voracious reader. Van Wyck Brooks, in his seminal and entertaining book *The Flowering of New England*, (1940) writes that Parker's "library was a river of books that flooded his house from attic to cellar." (Page 120) Quite a few who counted themselves among Boston's scholarly and educated elite (among them Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who later "discovered" Emily Dickinson) did not hesitate to turn to Parker for obscure references and sources.

Among his writings, *Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* (1842) is perhaps the clearest statement of Transcendentalism other than Emerson.

In 1848, Parker started the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, which he meant to be "the *Dial* with a beard," according to F. O. Matthiessen in his important 1941 study *American Renaissance, Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (Page 36). The *Review's* premier issue received poor reviews from his fellow Transcendentalists. Emerson tried to dissuade Parker from publishing any more issues. Thoreau said the *Review* had "no character," adding that it was "not so good a book as the Boston Almanack." (Baker, 274) Nevertheless, in his customary Transcendentalist fashion, Parker continued

Theodore Parker

Page 3

publication. Twelve issues of the *Review* were printed before it went bankrupt in 1850. Unlike Alcott, who fell into a deep depression when his Fruitlands experiment ended disastrously, Parker took his failure in stride and even seemed to gain strength from the experience. As Baker points out, "He turned to politics with the same fervor he had brought to the polemics of theology,..." (Page 278)

For example, Parker became even more outspoken in his support of women's rights. In an 1853 sermon entitled *The Public Function of Women*, he said, "To make one-half of the human race consume all their energies in the functions of housekeeper, wife, and mother, is a waste of the most precious material God ever made." (Richardson, 533)

Parker's "politics" in the 1850's, however, were overwhelmingly devoted to one over-riding issue—the abolition of slavery.

The Abolitionist

In 1848 Parker had written his *Letter to the People of the United States Touching the Matter of Slavery*. In this tract he methodically proved the evil of slavery, and he established himself as one of the leaders of the abolitionist movement.

He had long been involved in the Underground Railroad, but with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 the outraged Parker became openly active in assisting the escape of runaway slaves. He organized the Boston Vigilance Committee, 20 of whose black members brazenly "stole" the captured runaway Shadrach Minkins out of the courthouse and sent him on his way north on the Railroad in 1851. The Committee also had a schooner at its disposal called the *Moby Dick* which, under the cover of sight-seeing excursions, transported fugitive slaves. (Richardson, 495)

In 1851 Parker's anti-slavery sermon *The Chief Sins of the People* was published and Emerson obtained a copy. Impressed, he wrote to Parker, "We all love and honour you, and have come to think every drop of your blood and every moment of your life of a national value." (Baker, 373) Not everyone, however, prized Parker's anti-slavery work and life so highly. One time he was indicted for attempting to rescue Anthony Burns, a runaway slave who had been arrested under the Fugitive Slave Law. (Baker, 377)

Because of threats against his life he took to keeping a loaded pistol by his side as he worked late into the night on his next sermon or lecture.

The historian Henry Steele Commager wrote of Parker, "His genius lay in agitation." (Rivard, 17) In his unstinting support of John Brown, however, this "agitation" turned lethal. John Brown had become a hero to the abolitionists because of his anti-slavery crusade in the Kansas territory in the mid-1850's. His actions in "Bloody Kansas" included the massacre at Pottawatomie Creek, where Brown and his men hacked to death five proslavery farmers in retaliation for the burning of Lawrence, Kansas, a Free-soil stronghold. In spite of this violence, Brown was a hero in New England. His fund-raising talks there filled the lecture halls, and his appearances in Concord drew the admiring Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau, and others in the Transcendentalist circle.

Parker did more than simply attend Brown's lectures and contribute money. He became one of the Secret Six Committee that helped finance and plan the raid on Harper's Ferry. The other members of the Committee were Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Franklin B. Sanborn, Gerrit Smith, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, and George Luther Stearns. All except Smith were New Englanders. Parker's tuberculosis forced him to leave the country before the raid actually took place, and while it is not certain how much he knew about Harper's Ferry, Parker did know that Brown meant to "set fire to the whole country from the Potomac to Savannah." (Baker, 378-382)

Brown's subsequent capture, trial, and hanging made him a martyr to the abolitionist cause and a saint to the Transcendentalists. From Rome, before the execution, Parker wrote, "Brown will die...like a martyr and also like a saint....I think there have been few spirits more pure and devoted than John Brown's, and none that gave up their breath in a nobler cause." (Baker, 386)

With these words Theodore Parker could have been writing his own epitaph. He worked unremittingly to reform the faith that he ministered, the country that he loved, and the hearts of the American people, striving to turn all towards the face of God.

He died at age 50 of tuberculosis in Florence, Italy, in 1860, and did not live to see the Emancipation he risked so much to bring about.

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody

Page One

At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1804, in Billerica, MA
- ◆ Died: 1894
- ◆ Teacher; Writer; Owner of Boston bookstore, on West Street close to Boston Common, where Transcendentalists and many others involved in the New England Renaissance frequently met, where plans for Brook Farm were considered, and where *The Dial* was published. Margaret Fuller held her *Conversations* at the bookstore starting in 1839.
- ◆ Initially taught at mother's school while still a teen-ager, then opened a school with her sister Mary.
- ◆ Assisted Bronson Alcott at the experimental Temple School in 1834-1835.
- ◆ Returned to teaching after fire destroyed bookstore in 1844.
- ◆ Sister Sophia married Nathaniel Hawthorne.
- ◆ Sister Mary married Horace Mann, educator.
- ◆ She was an ardent abolitionist.
- ◆ Founded first kindergarten in U.S. in 1860.
- ◆ Lectured at Bronson Alcott's School of Philosophy in Concord from 1879 to 1884.
- ◆ Wrote *A Record of a School* in 1835, about Temple School.

In Depth...

Member of a prominent New England family, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody found herself in the center of the vortex of ideas that swirled around Boston and Concord in the 1830's and 1840's and that is today commonly referred to as the New England Renaissance. While an eager Transcendentalist, her reach extended beyond what was then referred to as the *Newness* to progressive educational experimentation. The role of women in the Transcendentalist movement is often overlooked, and when women are mentioned, the list often starts and stops with Margaret Fuller. A number of women, however, played significant roles, and one of the most important players was Elizabeth Peabody.

She had an early and long-lasting relationship with Emerson that was both social and what today would be termed professional, and she had a close working relationship with Bronson Alcott. In fact, she was the one who introduced Alcott to Emerson, thereby initiating one of the great American friendships of the last century. She also was responsible for introducing Jones Very to Emerson and the rest of the Transcendentalist circle, thereby reinforcing what at times could be a passionately spiritual dimension of the movement.

The Transcendentalists were hungry for English language translations of European philosophical works, and one of Peabody's earliest contributions was to provide Emerson and others with several translations of European writings, such as G. Oegger's *The True Messiah*, which Emerson used to help formulate his notions about the importance of language and etymology. (Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson*, pages 259-260)

In the late 1830's and well into the 1840's her bookstore on West Street in Boston became the touchstone for the Transcendentalists, as well as for others contributing to the literary and cultural American Renaissance which was centered in New England. It was at Peabody's bookstore that the legendary Transcendentalist publication *The Dial* was published. Margaret Fuller presented her series of lectures there starting in 1839; and it was there that plans were laid for the Transcendentalist commune Brook Farm.

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody

Page Two

But it was as an educator that Elizabeth Peabody made her most important contributions. She began her teaching career while still a teen-ager, at her mother's school. After that, she opened a school with her sister, Mary Peabody. These experiences served as a useful preparation for her work with Bronson Alcott at the Temple School in 1834-1835.

Peabody served as Alcott's assistant at the Temple School, which for its time was a radical experiment in the education of young children. Catherine Rivard, in her informative booklet *American Transcendentalism* (Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association, 1991, pages 7-8), states that Bronson Alcott believed that "children are the creation of a perfect God, with a memory of the perfect world they left behind, (and that) one might learn from such children, particularly about spiritual matters. He developed this theory in his famous Temple School (1834-1838), by allowing children, through the art of conversation, to offer their own interpretations of the gospels."

Elizabeth Peabody recorded Alcott's educational experiments at the Temple School in two books, the first entitled *Record of a School* (1835), and the second and far more controversial entitled *Conversations on the Gospels in Mr. Alcott's School* (1836, first volume; second volume by Margaret Fuller). Carlos Baker, in his *Emerson Among The Eccentrics*, writes that Peabody's desk was at the north end of the schoolroom, and that she taught Latin and arithmetic. (Pages 45-46) Baker adds that Alcott "adapted a version of the Socratic method to draw forth the ideas and reactions of his pupils, patiently pausing to explore the actual or symbolic meanings of single words." (Page 47) Peabody not only assisted Alcott but was impressed with his methods and assiduously transcribed his lessons. As Baker points out, "After classes closed for the spring quarter, Elizabeth Peabody hurried into print with her *Record of a School*, a detailed account of Alcott's teaching methods along with extensive verbatim quotations from his talks with the children. Alcott encouraged this undertaking in the hope that such dignified advertising might help to spread the Temple School gospel. But it had also the unexpected advantage of calling himself and his work to Emerson's attention." (Page 48)

Peabody's second book about the Temple School, *Conversations on the Gospels*, was the catalyst for the school's downfall. As she had done the previous term, Peabody transcribed often word-for-word accounts of Alcott's dealings with his students, but this time she did not want the book published, because Alcott had not shied away from answering his student's frank questions about the human life cycle and sexuality that they encountered in their studies, often from the Bible. She realized these verbatim accounts could easily be misconstrued and taken out of context, but Alcott insisted that the book be published. Peabody was right. A Boston newspaper branded the book "indecent and obscene." (Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson*, page 265) The enrollment at the Temple School dropped precipitously, and it closed within two years.

Her experiences with her mother, her sister, and Alcott persuaded her that the prevailing teaching methods of the time— which included harsh physical discipline and rote memorization and treated children as if they were miniature adults— were not only outdated but harmful to the proper development of young people. Her progressive educational philosophy was given its most effective and influential expression in 1860 when she opened the first kindergarten in the United States. She had studied Friedrich Froebel's revolutionary method of education in Germany and brought back from that country several teachers versed in the new methods. Unlike Alcott's experiment of a generation before, this attempt succeeded, and the kindergarten movement flourished, aided by Peabody's magazine *Kindergarten Messenger* (1873-1875) and her book *Lectures in the Training Schools for Kindergartens* (1888). (*Benet's Readers Encyclopedia of American Literature*, pages 833-834)

Peabody resumed her professional association with Bronson Alcott during the summers of 1879-1884, when she was a lecturer at Alcott's Concord School of Philosophy.

Other writings by Peabody include *A Last Evening with Allston* (1886), *Chronological History of the United States* (1856), and *Reminiscences of William Ellery Channing* (1880). (*Benet's*, pages 833-834)

Jones Very



"Use what language you will, you can never say anything but what you are."

At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1813, in Salem, Mass.
- ◆ Died: 1880
- ◆ Poet, Essayist, Mystic, and Religious Ecstatic; believed his poems were dictated by the Holy Ghost
- ◆ Introduced into the Transcendental circle in Salem, Boston, and Concord by Elizabeth Peabody, but disagreed with some basic Transcendental tenets
- ◆ Championed by Emerson despite Very's eccentricities
- ◆ Emerson edited and arranged to have Very's first book of poems published: *Essays and Poems* in 1839
- ◆ Taught at Fisk Latin School
- ◆ Attended Harvard College and Harvard Divinity School
- ◆ Greek tutor while at Harvard
- ◆ Unitarian minister
- ◆ Because of his religious zealotry and unbalanced behavior, was briefly committed to the McClean Asylum in Somerville, Mass. Defended by Emerson and Elizabeth Peabody.
- ◆ Other works by Very, published after his death: *Poems* (1883) and *Poems and Essays* (1886)

In Depth...

Jones Very was perhaps the most zealous and least compromising of the group of young intellectuals that gravitated to Emerson in the late 1830's and early 1840's, and he presented Emerson with a clear challenge to his Transcendentalist beliefs. In his seminal essay *Self-Reliance*, Emerson made the famous assertion, "Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood." Jones Very was very difficult to understand, and his obsessed spirituality led many to believe he was mad.

According to Gay Wilson Allen, in his insightful biography *Waldo Emerson*, Very "believed in the most literal sense that his every action and utterance was God-inspired." (Page 324) Allen points out that Very took Emerson's assertion in his *Divinity School Address* that present-day ministers had lost their way and were teaching a lifeless religion "too literally," and proceeded to publicly condemn the clergy in his hometown of Salem. (Ibid) A number of people in Salem suggested that Very be committed to an insane asylum. Very voluntarily entered the McLean Hospital in Charlestown, Massachusetts. He remained there for a month, at which time he was pronounced sane by the hospital doctors.

The similarity of Jones Very's experience to that of Socrates and Jesus and Galileo did not go unnoticed by Emerson. Here was a man who dared speak what he felt was the truth without regard to the opinions of others or to the serious consequences that awaited him. Emerson not only tolerated but embraced and sponsored a man whom he thought "profoundly sane," (*Benet's Readers Encyclopedia of American Literature*, page 1088), even though Very insisted that Emerson was "not right" in some of his Transcendentalist assertions.

Emerson recognized that Very had undergone the transcendental experience about which he himself had written and spoken so eloquently.

Other Important Transcendentalists: Brownson, Channing, and Clarke

Orestes A. Brownson (1803-1876)

More than any of the other Transcendentalists, Brownson took this Emerson dictum from *Self-Reliance* to heart:

Speak what you think now in hard words, and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said today.

This was especially true of his religious life. He was born a Puritan; then, at age 19, he became a Presbyterian. Just two years later he joined the Universalists and was ordained a Unitarian minister. He ran afoul of the Universalist establishment because of his too-liberal stands, so he “jumped ship” to the Unitarians. From there it was just a quick side-step to Transcendentalism. As a Transcendentalist he was a frequent participant in the discussions of the transcendental Club and was a contributor to the *Dial*. He even tried establishing his own church before converting to Catholicism. He was soon condemned as a heretic by the hierarchy for trying to “Americanize” Catholicism.

Politically, he tried his hand at Socialism, and was one of the founders of the Workingman’s Party. He was also active in the Democratic Party at a time when the Whigs were in the majority. He then claimed to lose faith in the common people, perhaps because they refused to vote for Democrats.

As a writer and editor he founded the *Boston Quarterly Review* in 1838, which later became *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*. This was a successful publication which lasted for 30 years. He also wrote several novels, one of them autobiographical.

William B. Cairns, in his *A History of American Literature* (1912), gave a harsh appraisal of Brownson’s career, accusing him of being “flippant”: *His frequent changes of party and church did much to discredit him, and his ideas were often not taken seriously.* (253)

William Ellery Channing (1818-1901)

The nephew and namesake of the founder of Unitarianism, Channing knew most of the Transcendentalists and was one of the best friends of Henry David Thoreau. He attended but did not graduate from Harvard, moved west to Cincinnati, and married Ellen Fuller, the sister of Margaret Fuller.

In 1842 he moved to Concord and joined the group of Transcendentalists circling in orbit about Emerson’s sun. He drew closest to Thoreau, however, and their long walks together have become part of the lore of the cultural and literary awakening that took place in ante-bellum New England.

Channing wrote the first full biography of his friend, entitled *Thoreau, the Poet-Naturalist*, which was published in 1873.

Cairns tells us that “*his friends felt that he had the temperament and insight of a true poet, and some of his verses strike a purer note than those of Cranch or Very*” (*other Transcendentalist poets*)... (252) Many of his poems can be found in the posthumously published *Poems of Sixty-Five Years*, collected by F. B. Sanborn (1902).

James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888)

Though a native of New England, he first became well known as the editor of the *Western Messenger*, a Unitarian periodical, and as one of the Transcendentalist “apostles” to the west. He resided and worked in both Louisville and Cincinnati before returning to Boston. A Unitarian minister, he founded the Church of the Disciples in 1841. He soon established himself as one of the foremost reformers of the decade, fighting for women’s suffrage and the abolition of slavery. His was a charismatic personality, and he was most influential as a preacher and lecturer.

His most important published work is *Ten Great Religions*, which, according to Cairns, “attracted considerable attention.” (254) It was published in two installments (1871 and 1883).

Creative Outlets: *The Transcendental Club and The Dial*

The Transcendental Club:

This important series of gatherings “was a forum for new ideas, a clearing-house, full of yeast and ferment, informal, open-ended, far from the usual exclusive social clique conveyed by the word *club*” (Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson, The Mind on Fire*, 246). The first full meeting was held at the Boston home of George Ripley in September, 1836, less than two weeks after the publication of Emerson’s seminal essay *Nature*. Besides Ripley and Emerson, those in attendance were Bronson Alcott, Frederic Henry Hedge, James Freeman Clarke, Orestes Brownson, Convers Francis, and three students from the Harvard Divinity School.

This gathering of original thinkers had several appellations, none of them official. It was often referred to as Hedge’s Club by Emerson because it met whenever Frederic Hedge visited Boston or Concord from his congregation in Bangor, Maine. It was also called by some the Aesthetic Club. Most appropriately, though, it was referred to as the Symposium, because those who participated insisted on the unfettered exploration of ideas. Several of the topics discussed at these meetings were “American Genius,” “Education of Humanity,” “Pantheism,” and “Mysticism.” Initial discussions and plans for both Brook Farm and the *Dial* were also held at these meetings.

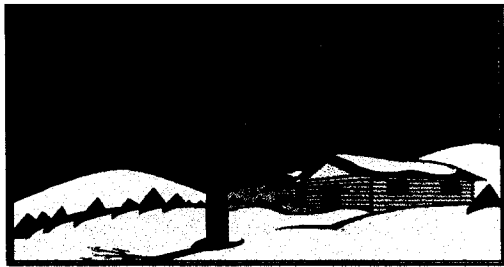
Other notable figures who participated from time to time were Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth and Sophia Peabody, Theodore Parker, William Ellery Channing, and Jones Very.

The Dial:

The publication begun by Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, and other members of the Symposium in 1840 transcended its relatively brief existence to become a significant influence on American literature.

The first editor of the *Dial*, Fuller was tough, over-worked, and unpaid. She accepted for publication only what she considered to be the highest-quality articles and poems, even rejecting early submissions by both Thoreau and Ellery Channing. After two years she willingly gave up editorship of the *Dial* to Emerson. Fuller and Emerson hoped that the articles and poems found in the *Dial* would both shock and challenge the reader to rethink the world and his or her place in it. The contents of the quarterly publication were eclectic and included submissions as diverse as Alcott’s dreamy *Orphic Sayings*, and Theodore Parker’s straightforward *The Divine Presence in Nature*. The *Dial* was also an early outlet for the poems of Christopher Cranch and Jones Very. (Carlos Baker, *Emerson Among the Eccentrics*, 133-136) The quarterly’s circulation never exceeded a few hundred, and, despite Emerson’s doggedness, ceased publication in 1844.

But the idea of the *Dial* did not die. It has had three different incarnations since 1844— in Cincinnati, Chicago, and New York—from about 1860 to 1960. Some of the authors and poets published in these later versions were Sherwood Anderson, William Dean Howells, Conrad Aiken, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Marianne Moore, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and William Carlos Williams. (*Benet’s*, 257-258)



Part Two:

Teaching

Transcendentalism

Teaching Transcendentalism to Social Studies Students

Transcendentalism should not just be a topic for English class. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Theodore Parker, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, and the others involved in what was then termed by many the “Newness” had a profound effect on the events of their times, and their contributions to America’s history deserve a more detailed airing than the three-quarters of page 235 of the textbook used in St. Mary’s County high schools (*A History of the United States*, Prentice Hall, 1990). The article on that page is well-written and concise, but can only serve as a starting point for an adequate appreciation of this important movement and its participants. The purpose here is to suggest some ways that *A Teacher’s Guide to Transcendentalism* can be used by social studies teachers to enrich their students’ knowledge of an important era in America and Transcendentalism’s lasting legacy.

Using the *Guide* by Itself

A Teacher’s Guide to Transcendentalism can be used, whole or in part, to teach students of varying abilities at each of the four high school grade levels. Here are some ways it can be used to complement the traditional social studies curriculum:

- The *Civil Disobedience* handouts, for example, can be used in both the ninth-grade civics and twelfth-grade contemporary issues courses.
- The handouts on *The Cosmopolitans and World View* and *Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism* can be used in both the tenth-grade world history and eleventh-grade American history classes.
- The *Transcendentalism Notes for English 11S* handout and its accompanying quiz are appropriate reinforcement tools for social studies students on the standard level when studying the period right before the Civil War.
- *The Student’s Guide to Transcendentalism* is beneficial for U. S. history students on both the college-bound and advanced placement levels. *The Student’s Guide* includes background information not readily available in the assigned texts or even in the most commonly used reference books. Questions about Emerson, Transcendentalism, or a closely related topic often appear on advanced placement tests.

The handout for *Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism* has its own set of study and essay questions. Following are suggested study questions for *The Cosmopolitans and World View*, which were not included on the handout:

1. What does the term *cosmopolitan* mean?
2. What qualifications must an individual have to be included among the cosmopolitans?
3. The way an individual perceives the universe is called _____.
4. Which of the cosmopolitans was the last guardian of the great library of the Ancient World? What was her fate?
5. Who was the most brilliant of the cosmopolitans whose ideas were centuries ahead of their time?
6. Who was the most important patron of the Enlightenment?
7. Name the two American cosmopolitans.
8. Why have there not been any cosmopolitans since Goethe?
9. Identify and describe the only world view that is not named after an individual, but a theory.
10. How does the Copernican world view differ from the Aristotelian and the Ptolemaic?

Concordance

The Teacher's Guide to Transcendentalism can also be used in conjunction with most U. S. history textbooks. What follows is the suggested concordance of the guide with Boorstin and Kelley's *A History of The United States*, currently one of the country's most widely used high school texts.

- *Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism* can be used with Chapter 2, Section 4, "The Puritans come to New England," 36-40.
 - *The Cosmopolitans and World View* can be used with the following:
 - Chapter 5, Section 4, "Writing a nation's constitution," 104-109
 - Chapter 5 Review, 113
 - Chapter 7, Section 1, (about Thomas Jefferson) "The man and his policies," 141-144
 - Chapter 8, Section 5, "A national spirit," 180-181.
 - *The Student's Guide to Transcendentalism* (whole or in part) can be used in concordance with:
 - Chapter 10, Section 2, "The Industrial Revolution," 218-222
 - Chapter 10, Section 5, "The cotton kingdom," 228-231
 - Chapter 11, Section 1, "An age of reform," 233-239
 - Chapter 11, Section 2, "The abolition movement," 239-241
 - Chapter 11, "Manifest Destiny," 250-251
 - Chapter 11, Section 5, "War With Mexico," 251-253
 - Chapter 12, Section 1, "The Compromise of 1850," 255-262
 - Chapter 12, Section 2, "How the compromise collapsed," 262-266
 - Chapter 12, "John Brown's Raid, 1859," 269-270.
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- The handouts on *Amos Bronson Alcott*, *Margaret Fuller*, *Elizabeth Peabody*, and *Civil Disobedience* (especially the teacher's versions) serve as complements for:
 - Chapter 30, Section 3, "Education and religion," 651-652
 - Chapter 31, "The Peace Corps," 667
 - Chapter 31, Section 4, "A New Frontier," 671-674
 - Chapter 32, Section 2, "The Great Society," 682-685
 - Chapter 32, Section 3, "Black revolt and youth rebellion," 685-689
 - Chapter 32, Section 4, "The most unpopular war," 690-694
 - Chapter 32, "Opposition to the war," 703.
 - Many parts of the *Teacher's Guide* can be used with:
 - Chapter 34, Section 1, "The two ideals," 718-723
 - Chapter 34, Section 2, "Dealing with racism," 723-726
 - Chapter 34, Section 3, "Women seek equality," 726-731
 - Chapter 34, Section 7, "New vistas of equality," 741-744.
 - The *Civil Disobedience* handouts would also work well with "Organizing farm laborers," in Chapter 34, 732-733.

Transcendentalism in Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*

Perhaps no speech has proven to be more significant to the course of America's history than Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, delivered at the dedication of a national military cemetery on the site of the Pennsylvania battlefield in November, 1863. Lincoln was not the main speaker at the dedication ceremony. That honor had been reserved for Edward Everett, a teacher of Ralph Waldo Emerson, an accomplished orator, and Harvard president whom Lincoln on one occasion gently derided as "being famous for being famous." Everett spoke for two hours, giving an engaged audience a dramatic account of the battle and an elaborate interpretation of its greater meaning. Lincoln, who had been invited as a courtesy to the Commander-in-Chief of the Union soldiers who had so recently been buried at the new cemetery, spoke almost immediately after Everett—for about three minutes. His high-pitched voice carried well, and he was interrupted by applause several times. Everett later graciously congratulated Lincoln, stating, "You came closer to the point in two minutes than I did in two hours."

What was the point of Lincoln's 10-sentence, 272-word address? With Lincoln, the occasion, the context, of a speech had always been of paramount importance. He had used his *First Inaugural Address* in 1861 to plea for a reconciliation with the seceding South, appealing to "the better angels of our nature" in an attempt to forestall civil war. He had delayed issuing *The Emancipation Proclamation* until after the so-called Union "victory" at Antietam in 1862 so that the proclamation freeing the slaves in those areas that were still in rebellion as of January 1, 1863, would not appear to be an act of desperation by a President facing defeat. His *Second Inaugural Address*, in 1865, would again be a plea for national reconciliation at the prospect of a complete Northern victory. With the Union army's success at Gettysburg in early July, 1863, the tide of the war had turned irretrievably in the North's favor, and the question of victory in Lincoln's mind was not *if*, but *when*. With the foresight inherent in his greatness, Lincoln knew that a restoration of the Union was not an end in itself, but the beginning of a renewed

national life, and he realized that the nation's people needed to be prepared for that coming new reality. Some historians have claimed that Lincoln succeeded in remaking the United States in his own image, that the country we have today stems from the aftermath of the North's victory and the forcible repatriation of the South. This is only partly true. Lincoln did in fact remake America, but in the image that had been envisioned by Thomas Jefferson in *The Declaration of Independence*. In the *Gettysburg Address*, Lincoln makes clear with his famous "four score and seven years ago" that the nation had its beginning in 1776, the year of the *Declaration*, and not in 1787, when the *Constitution* was ratified. When Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg, however, this was not the common understanding. It had been commonly held that while the *Declaration* had effectively separated the colonies from the British Empire, the nation itself had not been created until the basic law—the *Constitution*—was approved by the people. Lincoln had seen things differently years before he became President, as his earlier speeches and writings demonstrate. Lincoln was insistent that the Southern states could not secede because the *Declaration* had created the nation on July 2, 1776, as an organic whole. To allow secession would be tantamount to dismemberment. Those "mystic chords of memory" of which he so eloquently spoke in his *First Inaugural Address*, were more than just poetic images to Lincoln; to him, they comprised a collective national consciousness that secession must not be allowed to obliterate.

Garry Wills, in his Pulitzer Prize winning study, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (Simon & Schuster, 1992) writes that with this speech, "Lincoln had revolutionized the Revolution, giving people a new past to live with that would change their future indefinitely" (38). Wills claims that Lincoln believed "the Declaration somehow escaped the constraints that bound the Constitution. It was free to state an ideal that *transcended* its age, one that serves as a touchstone for later strivings..." (102) He then goes on to reveal the tremendous influence Transcendentalism had on the mind of Lincoln.

According to Wills, three Transcendentalists in particular influenced Lincoln—Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Bancroft, and particularly Theodore Parker. He asserts that Lincoln "was bound to be affected by the rhetoric, assumptions, and conscious ideals of the men who shaped his culture....He knew, in different degrees, the work of the Transcendentalists..." (103). Before he became President, Lincoln had heard Emerson speak on at least one occasion, and in 1854 had attended Bancroft's lecture on *The Necessity, the Reality, and the Promise of the Progress of the Human Race* (104-105). It was through his Springfield law partner, William Herndon, however, that Lincoln became acquainted with the writings of Theodore Parker, a Transcendentalist who in his own lifetime was nearly as well known as Emerson himself and who was the most vociferous in his insistence on social reform. Wills tells us that "the writings of Parker himself, which Herndon pushed upon Lincoln, were far more down-to-earth (than Herndon's Transcendental musings), and chimedj with many of Lincoln's own preoccupations" (106).

Parker believed that the "finest legacy" of the Founding Fathers had been *The Declaration of Independence*, which was, in Parker's words, a "transcendental proposition," (107) an ideal which the Constitution in its then-present form had not fully realized (108), and an ideal against which was working an insidious "conspiracy" whose

aim was to spread slavery to every corner of the country, even the free states and territories. Lincoln alluded to this so-called “conspiracy” in his famous “House Divided” speech in June, 1857, just a few months after the infamous *Dred Scott* Supreme Court decision (113-118). As did Parker, Lincoln saw the dangers inherent in denying blacks their humanity and their place in the national experience. According to Wills, Lincoln’s call in the *Gettysburg Address* for “a new birth of freedom” stemmed from the *Declaration’s* “proposition that all men are created equal,” a Transcendental proposition that is “the only ground of legitimate union for the American nation...” (120).

Role Playing

Two ideas for role-playing for students in social studies classes emerge from the information provided in *A Teacher’s Guide to Transcendentalism*. Each requires the participation of a significant number of students and entails a substantial amount of research on their part. These assignments could take the place of the regular research paper for those students who participate.

The Symposium: Using the handouts entitled *The Cosmopolitans and World View, Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism*, and *What Is Transcendentalism?* as starting points, each student in the class would assume the identity of one of the Cosmopolitans, philosophers, or scientists mentioned in these handouts. They would first research the life and beliefs of their subject, summarizing this basic information in a typed paper with citations and a list of works cited. More importantly, however, they would find the answers to a series of questions to be discussed during “The Symposium.” Each student would find out how his or her subject would have answered these questions. These answers would be typed out in paragraph form in the first person, as if the Cosmopolitan or philosopher or scientist were writing it himself or herself.

“The Symposium” itself would last for three-to-five class periods, enough time for all the students in the class to participate. Specifically, each student would appear in a costume approximating the dress of his or her subject, and would be prepared to answer the questions posed by the leader of the symposium—Socrates. The catch is that the teacher would be Socrates, and would have to apply the Socratic Method in eliciting responses from the gathered great minds. This would involve more than dressing in a toga. The teacher would have to research Plato’s *Republic* and *Phaedras* to find Socrates’s answers.

Here are some possible questions:

1. What is Reality?
 2. What is Truth?
 3. What is Virtue?
 4. What is Beauty?
 5. What is Justice?
 6. Can an individual meet the demands of society and still maintain his or her own individuality? If not, why not? If so, how?
 7. Does the individual ever have the right to disobey society’s laws? If not, why not? If so, under what circumstances?
 8. Do the ends ever justify the means? If so, under what circumstances? If not, why not?
-

The Trial of Henry David Thoreau: What if Thoreau's poll tax had not been paid for him, and he had had to stand trial for his offense? This scenario presents an opportunity for the students to see the application of Transcendentalist ideas in an easily understood setting. It would also give students the opportunity to state their own perceptions and opinions of Transcendentalism in an organized forum where their ideas and judgments would have a direct consequence—a verdict.

This would be an opportunity for every student in the class to participate. Besides the obvious roles to be played by Thoreau, Sam Staples, the constable who arrests and jails him, the prosecuting and defense attorneys, and the jury (the teacher would be the judge), there would be the witnesses to testify for and against Thoreau.

Those testifying for the prosecution would be:

- Constable Staples, who, though he personally liked Thoreau, had no choice but to arrest him as a result of his absolute refusal to compromise or bend in any way. Staples would explain what the poll tax was and why it was important for every law-abiding citizen to pay it;

- James Garty, a respected Concord resident, who would testify that while he thought Thoreau to be honest, his refusal to pay the tax was dangerous because “it wouldn't do to have everybody like him, or his way of thinking.” (Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, Dover Publications, Inc., 1982) He would then explain that anarchy would result if people obeyed only those laws with which they agreed.

Those testifying for Thoreau would be Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, Theodore Parker, and Elizabeth Peabody.

- *Emerson* would attest to Thoreau's honesty, of course, but more importantly he could explain to the jury the philosophical and moral basis of Thoreau's refusal. He could prove to be a dangerous witness for the defense, however, as he initially had disapproved of Thoreau's refusal to pay the tax.

- *Alcott* would tell the jury about Thoreau's strict moral code and how he had been a conscientious teacher for his children. Unlike Emerson, Alcott supported Thoreau's refusal from the start.

- *Theodore Parker* would explain how Thoreau's refusal to obey this particular law had the force of morality, and would insist to the jury that the law of God always supersedes the law of man. He would add that righteous individuals had the duty to refuse to abide by unjust laws, which is the crux of civil disobedience.

- *Elizabeth Peabody* would also testify in favor of the concept of civil disobedience, and explain it in more detail. She would also testify that, if Thoreau were willing to write an essay laying out in detail the reasons for his refusal, she would print it in a new magazine she was in the midst of preparing for publication. (In fact, Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience, which grew out of the experience of his arrest and incarceration, was published for the first time in Peabody's periodical *Aesthetic Papers* in 1849, under the title *Resistance to Civil Government*)

- *Thoreau* would, of course, testify for himself. He would explain that he had refused to pay his tax because by doing so he would have given his tacit support to the institution of slavery and the conduct of the unjust with Mexico. He would then elaborate on the philosophy of civil disobedience.

Teaching Transcendentalism to English 11 Standard Students

High school students are famously quick to point out the irrelevance of the content of much of their required course work. This attitude has traditionally presented even the most experienced and dedicated teachers with persistent problems of motivation. If a student believes that what he or she is studying is unimportant, then it is extremely difficult to persuade that student to do more than the minimum work required to pass the course. One possible method of injecting such “relevance” into a unit of study is to frame the course work in a coherent and consistent context, and one of the best ways to provide context through the application of thematic units.

For the past several years I have taught literature on the eleventh-grade “standard” level (in reality a mixture of students of below-average, average, and above-average abilities in reading and writing whose behavior patterns range from commendable to disruptive) using the following thematic units: *The Individual and His Place in Society*; *Survival, Adventure, and Discovery*; *Voices of War, Justice Achieved, Justice Denied*, and *Relationships and Responsibilities*. Each unit progresses chronologically from colonial to modern times, but each of the assigned readings pertain only to that particular unit’s theme. For example, the Puritan minister Edward Taylor’s poetic meditation *Huswifery*, in which the speaker seeks to submerge his individuality in God’s will in order to be better able to do God’s work, is an early reading for *The Individual and His Place in Society*, while the Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet’s *To My Dear and Loving Husband* is the first reading for *Relationships and Responsibilities*. The Puritan governor and chronicler William Bradford’s account of the early years of New England’s settlement, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, is included in the *Survival, Adventure, and Discovery* unit. The advantages of separating these readings into three different units are several: first, reinforcement of the student’s grasp and retention of Puritan ideas, ideals, and history is attained through coherent repetition; second, the teacher avoids student “indigestion” attendant on a full plate of Puritanism by breaking the meal down into three smaller and manageable portions offered at separate and succeeding intervals in the school year; and third, the teacher is able to present the Puritans from three different and self-contained perspectives, enabling the student to envisage these early settlers not as stereotypes but as real people whose experiences have important lessons to teach us who are living in today’s world.

I have taught Transcendentalism in my English 11 Standard classes as part of *The Individual and His Place in Society*. Including Transcendentalism in this unit ameliorates its complexity by placing it in a context everyone can comprehend—human freedom and responsibility. This unit traces the evolution of American individualism from the time of Edward Taylor and the Puritans-- whose form of government was a strange mix of Platonic republican ideals and theocratic determinism that ran roughshod over individual liberties, to modern America, where the worship of individual liberties threatens to trample the tapestry of our democracy.

In between these two extremes students read:

- excerpts from the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, who epitomizes the potential of the individual and the American Dream;
- the prophetic insights of Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur;
- the adventures of Natty Bumppo, James Fenimore Cooper's rugged frontier hero;
- Ralph Waldo Emerson's tribute to self-reliance;
- Henry David Thoreau's musings at Walden Pond;
- Margaret Fuller's call for unfettered expression in *The Dial*;
- Thoreau's insistence on the primacy of conscience in *Civil Disobedience*;
- Nathaniel Hawthorne's insight into the terrible price of adherence to conscience in *The Minister's Black Veil*;
- Herman Melville's insight into the dangers of radical individualism in an excerpt from *Moby-Dick*;
- Emily Dickinson's stunningly individualistic poetic voice;
- Walt Whitman's stubbornly individualistic poetic voice;
- Robert Frost's praise of individual choice in *The Road Not Taken*;
- Frost's treatment of loneliness and isolation in *Acquainted with the Night* and *Desert Places*;
- W. H. Auden's warning about the emptiness of blind conformity in his poem *The Unknown Citizen*;
- Jack Kerouac's transcendental musings *Alone on a Mountaintop*;
- Carson McCullers' discussion about the conflict between the quest for identity and the need to belong in *The Mortgaged Heart*;
- Robert Penn Warren's poem about the necessity of independence for the creative genius in his poem *Audobon: A Vision*
- Ralph Ellison's revelation that Ralph Waldo Emerson was his namesake in the essay *Hidden Name and Complex Fate*.

All of these readings can be found in two anthologies still available, especially in St. Mary's County's high schools: Glencoe's *American Literature, Signature Edition*; and Scott, Foresman's *United States in Literature*.

Getting Started: Handouts

After completing the excerpts from Cooper's *The Deerslayer* and thereby having had a brief introduction to Romanticism, students should receive their copies of the handouts *Transcendentalism Notes for English 11S*, *The Essential Emerson*, *The Essential Thoreau*, and *Civil Disobedience, Student Handout*. Tell the students to keep these handouts together in their notebooks to be available to use in this part of the unit. Read *Transcendentalism Notes for English 11S*, out loud to the students, and inform them that there will be a quiz based entirely on this handout in two days.

Using *American Literature, Signature Edition*

Students should first read "The Transcendentalists" passage on page 154-155. Take special care that the students understand the term *intuition*. You might want to point out that the term *tuition* originally meant "that which can be taught," so *intuition* logically means "that which *cannot* be taught." Notes should be taken on all of the italicized terms in the passage.

Students should then read the article about the life and importance of Ralph Waldo Emerson on pages 159-160 and take notes on the article's major pieces of information. As an alternate or optional activity, students could answer the following comprehension questions in complete sentences:

1. What was Emerson's first full-time profession after college?
2. What tragedy did Emerson experience less than two years after entering this profession?
3. What forced him to quit this profession in 1832?
4. After extensive travels and study, where did he settle down with his new wife?
5. What was Emerson's *Savings Bank*? What did he "deposit" in it? When did he make "withdrawals"?
6. Name four American writers and poets influenced by Emerson.
7. True or False: Emerson often contradicted himself.
8. True or False: Emerson has often been misunderstood.
9. True or False: Since Emerson believed that "a man is stronger than a city," each individual has a license to do as he or she wishes.
10. What is the "Oversoul"?

The excellent excerpts from Emerson's *Nature* and *Self-Reliance* on pages 161-163 enable the students to consider some of Emerson's greatest ideas in manageable proportions. Using the *Transcendentalism Handout* and the notes from pages 154-155 as references, have the students write down what they consider to be the Transcendental ideas and concepts in each excerpt. They should set up their responses in three columns, according to the following model:

Transcendental Ideas	Citations from Essays	Paraphrases

An alternate activity provides an excellent opportunity for students to see how great writers state and develop theses in essays. These excerpts are such that they could be considered short essays. Lead the students through the two excerpts, identifying the thesis statement and supporting arguments in each. For example, the thesis of the *Self-Reliance* excerpt on page 163 is:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events.

The following could be the major arguments in support of the above thesis statement:

1. *Great men have always done so,...*
2. *And now we are men, and must accept the same transcendent destiny,...*
3. *A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines,...*
4. *To be great is to be misunderstood.*
5. *(Mankind) cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.*
6. *We are like children who repeat by rote the sentences of grandames and tutors...*
7. *If we live truly, we shall see truly.*

The students should then be given the *Transcendentalism Quiz, English 11S*. I prefer to allow the students to use their *Transcendentalism Handout* while taking the quiz, thereby giving the students practice in retrieving information from sources and enhancing the importance of the *Handout* in the minds of the students.

The biographical information about Margaret Fuller is rather brief, so you may want to give your Standard-level students a copy of the *Margaret Fuller* article from the *Student's Guide to Transcendentalism*, as well as a copy of the teacher's *The Dial: At a Glance/ In-Depth* for much-needed background information. *The Announcement of The Dial*, on pages 165-167, in reality was drafted by Fuller and edited by Emerson. This is a difficult selection for Standard-level students to read on their own, so I suggest that it be read out loud by the teacher; then, together as a class the students should immediately answer Study Questions 1-5 and 8 on page 167 in complete sentences.

Emerson's *The Rhodora* on page 169 is one of the best examples of lyric Transcendentalist poetry. The margin notes in the *Teacher's Edition* of the textbook are excellent but incomplete. "The self-same Power" revealed in the poem's last line is the Over-Soul; therefore, the speaker's unusual encounter with the rhodora in the woods is no accident; rather, it is part of a larger plan of which we only know a small fragment. On another level Emerson is exploring the nature of Virtue and Beauty. According to Emerson, Beauty occurs when an object, animate or inanimate, exists in its proper form and is performing its proper function, while Virtue exists when the individual discovers and accepts his or her proper place in the scheme of life. In this poem, the rhodora has Beauty, while the speaker demonstrates Virtue. The students could explain how this is so in a brief paragraph, using quotations from the poem to support their responses.

The biographical information about Henry David Thoreau on pages 172-173 complements very well *The Essential Thoreau* handout. The information about the relationship between Emerson and Thoreau is especially helpful. The third paragraph on page 172, however, is somewhat misleading. It states that "He (Thoreau) tried teaching school but did not like it." That is only partly true.

After graduating from Harvard in 1837, Thoreau was offered and accepted a position teaching in the Concord public schools. This was, as the eminent Thoreau scholar Walter Harding pointed out in his seminal authoritative biography *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (Dover Publications, Inc., 1982) a coveted appointment considering the country was in the midst of a Depression in the late 1830's. Thoreau, however, chafed under the pressure to adhere to what he considered to be harsh, outdated, and ineffective pedagogy. The final straw was broken when a member of the Board of Trustees insisted that Thoreau beat his students as a way to maintain classroom order.

Disgusted, Thoreau took two students at random and thrashed them, ostensibly to make the point that thrashing was pointless. He resigned just a few weeks into the session. The following year he started his own school, soon to be joined in the endeavor by his brother John. Free to teach as they wished, the two brothers developed enlightened and effective instructional strategies. Though the school could not survive the time's harsh economic conditions, Thoreau proved himself to be a life-long teacher who was especially effective and popular with young people, including Emerson's own children and Bronson Alcott's daughters, among them Louisa May Alcott.

The selections from *Walden* on pages 174-179 provide an overview of some of the book's major ideas that is just the right length for Standard-level students. The blue "Model for Active Reading" notes in the margins can be helpful, but are ignored by most Standard-level students unless specifically told to read them. The study questions on page 180 are worth doing. Average-level students find the "Recalling" questions especially helpful. The "Comparing Writers" essay assignment on page 180, while a good one, is better suited to upper-level students. The directed-reading questions on page 173, however, make an excellent topic for an average-level essay. They are:

What does Thoreau say we must do to live as individuals in the midst of society? Can we do that today?

The prewriting for this essay would entail the students' finding citations from the *Walden* selections which lay out Thoreau's prescription for keeping one's individuality in a society that insists on conformity. The prewriting would also call for specific ways students can apply Thoreau's ideas in today's America, which, if anything, is in practice even more insistent on uniform behavior. This essay should have an opening paragraph, which includes the thesis statement, a paragraph about Thoreau's prescription, and paragraph applying Thoreau's ideas to living in today's world, and a concluding paragraph which restates the thesis, summarizes the essay's main points, and provides a final comment.

An exercise that could be done as a warm-up for the above essay assignment is to consider the *Conclusion* excerpts on pages 178-179 to be a self-contained essay, and to work with the students in finding this "essay's" thesis and major supporting details. This is a straightforward exercise that students of both average and above-average language ability can use to reinforce skills involving both comprehension and detail organization. The following are the thesis and its seven supporting details:

Thesis: *I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. 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.*

Detail One: *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.*

Detail Two: *In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex,...*

Detail Three: *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.*

Detail Four: *However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names....Love your life, poor as it is.*

Detail Five: *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.*

Detail Six: *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;...*

Detail Seven: *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.*

In addition to needed practice in finding a thesis and its supporting arguments, the above seven details can be the basis for the following study questions:

1. What does Thoreau mean when he says that he left the woods because he “had several more lives to live”?

2. Thoreau writes that it is easy for us to “fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves.” What does he mean by “beaten track”?

3. Thoreau says, “However mean your life it, meet it and live it;...” The word *mean* has two basic meanings. What are they and how do they both apply to this quote? (**Teacher’s Note:** *Mean* means “mediocre” or “average”; it also means “unpleasant and unfair.”)

Review with your students the definition and use of *metaphor*. A metaphor is the comparison of two objects that, on the surface, seem to have nothing in common, but in fact have an underlying equivalence. A metaphor maintains, in effect, *that one thing is the same as another thing*, and this claim can be either stated directly or implied.

4. What is the meaning of the metaphor of the “different drummer”?

5. What does Thoreau mean when he says: “Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.”

This is also an appropriate place to review the literary devices *extended metaphor* and *simile*. An *extended metaphor* can begin as either a metaphor or simile, but the comparison is continued to the extent that, if the reader is not careful and alert, he or she can lose track of the fact that figurative language is being used and is not to be taken literally. A *simile*, of course, is a comparison of two unlike objects that uses like or as to make the comparison. A fine example of a simile to ask about occurs on page 179 when Thoreau tells us to “Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage.”

6. Why do you think Thoreau compares poverty to garden herbs, and especially sage? How are garden herbs used? What is special about sage?

(**Teacher’s Note:** Sage has been used as a medicinal herb, one that can maintain good health.)

7. How does the simile on page 179 that states “The life in us is like the water in the river” become an extended metaphor?

Using *United States in Literature, Medallion Edition*

Teachers who still have access to the *United States in Literature* texts which were used in the early and mid-1980's will find a number of readings that could be used in the teaching of Transcendentalism. For teaching on the Standard level, however, the excerpt from Thoreau's essay *Civil Disobedience* on pages 240-243 is perhaps the most appropriate to use, because it complements the handout on civil disobedience, it presents some of the essay's most important ideas, and it affords still another opportunity for students to find an essay's thesis and supporting arguments.

We teach our students to state an essay's thesis in the opening paragraph, and then use the succeeding paragraphs to develop and support that thesis. In longer essays such as *Civil Disobedience*, however, the essayist has the luxury of revealing his or her thesis further on. The opening paragraphs of *Civil Disobedience* are somewhat deceptive in that they give the reader varying impressions as to the main thrust of the essay. First it seems the text is going to be merely a diatribe against civil government; but then there follows a clarion call not for the abolition of government, but its improvement. Thoreau does not begin to broach his thesis until the fourth paragraph, when he questions the validity of majority rule. The thesis is not revealed until paragraph six on page 241 in which Thoreau states:

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth,-- certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.

This is the paragraph, then, which succinctly presents the age-old concept of civil disobedience in modern terms and states the essay's thesis. The preceding paragraphs are really arguments by induction, building a foundation of credibility for the startling proclamation of paragraph six. Paragraphs seven and following are arguments by deduction. Though the ellipses make it clear that only a part of the essay has been presented on pages 240-243, enough has been excerpted to show the essay's thesis, structure, and method of argumentation, and reviewing these would provide valuable lessons for Standard-level students in comprehension and interpretation.

In closing, it is to be stressed once more that the suggested lessons outlined above are just that-- suggestions; nevertheless, teaching Transcendentalism to Standard-level students in the context of a larger thematic unit on the individual and society has proven to be an effective strategy in my classes over the past five years.

Teaching Transcendentalism to English 11CM Students

Teaching Transcendentalism effectively to college preparatory students is made difficult by the erroneous presumption on the part of the teacher that higher-level students will read Emerson and Thoreau simply because they have the ability and have been assigned to do so. Today's reality is that many, if not most, college-bound students, in part because of the enormous demands on their time, will attempt to get by with doing as little reading as they can manage. This is almost tragic, because the Transcendentalists, especially Emerson and Thoreau, have a message that strikes at the heart of what it means to live a meaningful life, a message that adolescents on the verge of adulthood need to hear. Higher-level students, as with those of average ability, need to be held accountable for their assigned readings, but in ways that will be comprehensible, meaningful, and relevant.

Context and reinforcement are the keys to teaching on the college-bound level. For the past five years I have taught Transcendentalism as part of a continuum of philosophies and ideas that have shaped the western world since the end of the Renaissance. Through the Early Colonial, the Revolutionary, and the Early National periods of American history, culture, and literature the students learn about Determinism, Rationalism and Romanticism, respectively. This background in the history and importance of ideas prepares students for the terminology and complexity of Transcendentalism. They are then able to see that Transcendentalism is in actuality a part of humankind's continuing inquiry into the nature of existence, the reasons for the human condition, and the relationship of people to their God. In addition, teaching in the context of the "New England Renaissance" enables instructors to demonstrate that Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Fuller, Parker, and the rest were part of a period of unparalleled American creative ferment fostered by the freedom of the North and –ironically –fueled by the slavery of the South.

Using the Text

The major text and source for teaching English 11CM (Certificate of Merit) in St. Mary's County is *Adventures in American Literature, Pegasus Edition*, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (1989). This is the best textbook that I have used in 15 years of teaching high school American literature. The "Introductions" at the start of each chronological unit succinctly establish a context for the readings to follow, and provide valuable reinforcement for what the students are learning in their parallel eleventh-grade United States history course. (In fact, Transcendentalism is an appropriate topic for team teaching on the part of American literature and American history instructors. If only there were the time, the resources, and the will to do so.) These "Introductions" should not be omitted. Each of a unit's readings are preceded by a concise summary of the writer's life and importance. The summaries for Emerson and Thoreau, for example, are elegantly written essays which capture the essence of their work and philosophy.

The “Literary Elements” and “Commentaries” which follow many of the readings not only reinforce concepts but comprise a fine introduction to critical reading and literary interpretation. The “Writing About Literature” essay assignments follow logically from the readings and can be quite challenging, while the “Close Reading” exercises are valuable aids to comprehension. While there is not the time nor is it advisable to do all of these assignments for every reading, they should not be ignored.

The Teacher’s Guide to Transcendentalism contains two important handouts that should be distributed, read, and discussed while covering the literature units preceding “The Flowering of New England” section of the *Adventures in American Literature* textbook. *Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism* should be given to the students as part of *The Beginnings of the American Tradition* unit, and *The Cosmopolitans and World View* should be handed out while covering *The Revolutionary Period*.

The “Introduction” to *The Flowering of New England* offers a concise, if incomplete, definition of Transcendentalism on pages 208-210, and should be read carefully by the students. Here the teacher should introduce the students to the term *a priori knowledge*, as that is what is being described in the first paragraph of the article on page 208. (*A priori knowledge* is innate to the individual, existing *prior* to the individual’s birth, and is one of the keys to finding Truth.) The Romantic landscape painting on page 209 by Thomas Doughty, *In Nature’s Wonderland*, provides an opportunity for the students to visualize the definition they’ve read on pages 208-210. Here we see the rugged individual standing alone with his fowling piece; nevertheless, he is surrounded by Nature, and he is bathed in the light that also illuminates the distant mountains. He is part and parcel of the beauty which surrounds him. In such a setting he can find personal as well as universal meaning.

At this point the teacher has several options for using the *Teacher’s Guide*, dependent upon the nature and ability of the class and the amount of time the instructor is willing to use for this unit. At the very least, students should receive the following handouts *before* they read Emerson and Thoreau:

- *What Is Transcendentalism?*
- *Transcendentalism Factsheet*
- *The Essential Emerson and Thoreau*
- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- *Henry David Thoreau*.

If the teacher has decided to use the *Civil Disobedience* excerpt on pages 240-243 of the *United States in Literature* text—or to read the entire essay (available for downloading on-line through the *CyberSaunter* web site listed in the *Resources for Teachers* section of the *Guide*)—then students also should read the three-page student version of the *Civil Disobedience* handout *before* they read either. Again, context is the key to both comprehension and critical appraisal.

The complete *Student’s Guide to Transcendentalism* should be distributed if the teacher intends to go beyond Emerson and Thoreau, which is strongly recommended. The *Student’s Guide* includes articles on Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody, two notable and accomplished women who played a central role in the Transcendentalist movement. The complete *Student’s Guide* also makes a valuable student resource for possible research papers, American history, and college-level American literature.

Emerson Selections and Commentary, pages 214-228 of Adventures in American Literature. An effective method to ensure that the students read these pages is to have them take outline notes on the text which will be reviewed, collected, and graded. The reading can be separated into seven major sub-topics, which can be labeled:

- I. Introduction
- II. Nature
- III. The American Scholar
- IV. The divinity School Address
- V. Self-Reliance
- VI. Fate
- VII. Emerson's Influence and Legacy

The students will need to use the following handouts to aid them in completing this outline:

- What Is Transcendentalism?*
- Transcendentalism Factsheet*
- The Essential Emerson and Thoreau*
- Ralph Waldo Emerson.*

Each of the outline's seven sub-topics should have at least three major details, signified by capital letters:

- The Introduction discusses what Thoreau meant by the *soul*, the nature of a *transcendental experience*, and the circumstances under which such an experience can occur;
- For each of the five essays, Roman numerals II-VI, the students should include in their outlines the thesis of the essay, the arguments supporting that thesis, and the Transcendental ideas expressed by the essay, using the handouts as guides;
- The notes for VII, Emerson's Influence and Legacy, should be relatively easy for the students to find on pages 226-228. The *Essential Emerson and Thoreau* handout should prove helpful here.

Emerson's Poems: *The Rhodora, Brahma, and Concord Hymn*, pages 229-231: These poems can be taught in conjunction with the handout *Poems by Emerson*, which includes *Music* and an extended excerpt of *Threnody* (with study questions). Taken together, these five poems present a representative sampling of the subjects Emerson explored in his verse.

- *The Rhodora* discusses the nature of Beauty and Virtue and attempts to explain the Over-Soul's role in leading the individual to their discovery. In this poem Emerson asserts that Beauty results when a person, thing, animal, or object assumes its proper form and performs its intended function. Virtue results from an individual's recognizing and accepting that form and function. The Over-Soul, "the selfsame Power" in the poem, makes it possible for the individual to discover his or her proper role in the universe.
 - *Brahma* is Emerson's classic effort to describe the nature of the Over-Soul. The poem reinforces Emerson's assertion that the Over-Soul courses through and connects all people, things, events, places, and times. Emerson also points to the
-

overall harmony of the universe in the mind of Brahma, who sees “the big picture” while we are limited to experiencing or witnessing an event trapped in the moment.

When Brahma tells us, who are the “meek lover(s) of the good,” to “Find me, and turn thy back on heaven,” we are being urged to transcend our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual limitations so that we, too, may be able to see the overall harmony and beauty of Brahma’s plan for the universe.

- As the sub-title indicates, *Concord Hymn* was originally a song for the dedication of the monument at the Old North Bridge. Thoreau himself sang in the chorus. The music of the score has long since faded, but the “music” Emerson built into his lyrics can still be heard. This quality is the result of Emerson’s use of tetrameter, alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. A good exercise would be to have the students scan the poem for the meter and poetic devices.

If the poems from the handout are used, the study questions should be the basis of class discussion.

- The *Threnody* excerpt is Emerson’s moving lament for his dead son. Students should note how Emerson’s grief goads him into questioning his basic beliefs, and the teacher should point out that this makes the poem’s emotional tone ring true.
- The poem *Music* is, like *Brahma*, an assertion of the essential harmony of the universe. The speaker here, however, is not the Over-Soul, but merely a human being who has been able to transcend appearance and see the hidden reality.

Excerpts from Thoreau’s *Walden*, pages 235-246: As with the *Emerson Selections and Commentary*, to ensure careful reading, students should have to outline the selection. They will notice that Thoreau in these excerpts is much more pragmatic than Emerson, and the outline should reflect Thoreau’s practicality. The selection has six parts:

- I. Where I Lived, and What I Lived For
- II. Sounds
- III. Brute Neighbors
- IV. The Pond in Winter
- V. Spring
- VI. Conclusion

- For each part, the student should identify the major Transcendental ideas (from the *What Is Transcendentalism?* and *Transcendentalism Factsheet* handouts) and Thoreau’s suggestion for their practical applications in everyday life.
- The *Close Reading* on pages 245-246 is very helpful to understanding the excerpts and should be done with the students.
- The second *Writing About Literature* essay assignment on page 246, “Relating Thoreau’s Experiences to Emerson’s Ideas,” would be an excellent follow-up essay assignment for the outline assignment.

Thoreau’s poem, *The Inward Morning*: The use of this handout from *The Student’s Guide* helps to compensate for the short shrift given to Thoreau in the *Adventures in American Literature* text. Thoreau placed great emphasis, as did Emerson, on the importance of light in discovering Truth. Thoreau often related light to the dawn. As he wrote at the end of *Walden*: “There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.”

In this sense *The Inward Morning* can be directly connected to the *Conclusion* excerpt on pages 242-244. Again, teachers are urged to use the study questions on the handout.

Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*. It is strongly urged that teachers find and assign Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* for reading and discussion. Not only is this essay elegantly and forcefully written, it has also proven to be perhaps the most influential essay of the last 150 years. If the text *United States in Literature, Medallion Edition* (Scott, Foresman and Company, 1979) is still available, the excerpt on pages 240-243 provides the gist of Thoreau's argument and is an acceptable alternative to reading the entire text. The *Civil Disobedience* handout should be read and discussed before reading the essay. After reading, class discussion and follow-up writing assignments should have the following emphases:

- Students should consider and decide for themselves if civil disobedience is an acceptable method of protesting unjust laws and of seeking to change those laws. Students should consider both historical and current examples of civil disobedience during this evaluation. Again, the handout can be extremely helpful here.
- Students should discover the essay's overall thesis as well as the major arguments in support of that thesis. Discussion should center on the persuasiveness of those arguments.

The Research Paper

The following pages contain a suggested research paper assignment for college-bound students. I have used this with my English 11CM students and have had a great deal of success. All of the paper's requirements are detailed on the following pages, including an elaborated outline format which the students find extremely helpful. A suggested gradesheet is also provided. The topic is *The Importance of Transcendentalism*, and it requires the use of the following materials:

- *The Student's Guide to Transcendentalism*;
- *The Adventures in American Literature* textbook, or any other college-bound American literature text that has selections from the authors and poets assigned for this research paper (see assignment sheet);
- The essay *Civil Disobedience* (the full text or an extended excerpt);
- Sources from the library's reference shelf, preferably *Magill's* and *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*;
- Any other materials that the students can find on their own. You may want to provide them with some of the web sites listed in the *CyberSources* section of the *Teacher's Guide*.

Note that this assignment could serve as the class term paper, as it includes both Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, and extends to Carl Sandburg, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

RESEARCH PAPER FOR ENGLISH 11CM

The topic and title of your research paper will be *The Importance of Transcendentalism*.

Much of the research, drafting, and revising will be done in the classroom. Most of the sources that you will need to do this assignment will be available in the classroom.

You will use lined “three-by-five” note-cards to write your research notes. These note-cards will be collected and checked before you will be allowed to write your outline and rough draft, and will be worth 200 points.

The research paper itself will be worth 300 points. It will consist of the following (with point values in parentheses):

- a title page; (5)
- an in-depth formal outline; (40)
- a first draft, either hand-written or typed, that is thoroughly revised with the revisions showing on the draft; (50)
- a completed and typed manuscript copy of at least 2000 words; (100)
- at least 15 textual citations; (45)
- at least five different sources that are actually cited in the research paper; (30)
- a list of works cited. (30)

Research Paper Contents

Your research paper must have the following parts:

- I. Introduction with underlined thesis
- II. Definition of Transcendentalism
- III. Emerson
- IV. Thoreau
- V. Civil Disobedience
- VI. Other Transcendentalists
- VII. Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson
- VIII. Modern Echoes—F. Scott Fitzgerald and William Faulkner; Edna St. Vincent Millay and Carl Sandburg
- IX. Conclusion

Outline Form for Research Paper on The Importance of Transcendentalism

I. Introductory Paragraph with Underlined Thesis Statement

- A. Identification
- B. Definition
- C. Thesis

II. Definition of Transcendentalism

A. What is Transcendentalism?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

4.

B. Roots

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

C. Tenets

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

D. Influence

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

III. Emerson

- A. Life
- B. Importance
- C. Philosophy

IV. Thoreau

- A. Life
- B. Importance
 - 1. *Walden*
 - 2. *Civil Disobedience*

- 3. Importance to Environmental Movement
- 4. Naturalist (Scientific Observer and Classifier of Nature)
- V. Civil Disobedience
 - A. Definition
 - B. Historical Background
 - C. Civil Disobedience Today
 - D. Thoreau's Legacy
- VI. Other Transcendentalists
 - A. A. Bronson Alcott
 - B. Margaret Fuller
 - C. Theodore Parker
 - D. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody
- VII. Whitman and Dickinson
 - A. Walt Whitman
 - 1. Life
 - 2. Poetry
 - 3. Transcendentalist
 - B. Emily Dickinson
 - 1. Life
 - 2. Poetry
 - 3. Transcendentalist Elements
- VIII. Modern Echoes
 - A. F. Scott Fitzgerald and *Winter Dreams*
 - B. William Faulkner and *The Bear*
 - C. Edna St. Vincent Millay
 - 1. *God's World*
 - 2. *On Hearing a Symphony of Beethoven*
 - D. Carl Sandburg
 - 1. *Chicago*
 - 2. *Prayers of Steel*
- IX. Conclusion
 - A. Restatement of Thesis
 - B. Summary of Major Arguments in Support of the Thesis
 - C. Final Comment

Please note that for brevity's sake many sections of the above sample outline were not listed in the depth required when writing the actual draft. Remember, in several sections you must go to the fourth level in drafting your paper.

Gradesheet for Research Paper on *The Importance of Transcendentalism*

<u>Paper Requirement</u>	<u>Points Possible</u>	<u>Points Received</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1. Title Page	5		
2. Formal Outline	40		
3. First Draft, With Revisions	50		
4. Manuscript Copy	100		
5. At Least 15 Textual Citations (Properly Cited)	45		
6. At Least Five Different Sources Cited in Paper	30		
7. Works Cited (In Proper Order With Proper Punctuation)	30		



*Student
Handouts*

Transcendentalism Notes for English 11S

(Standard Level)

Transcendentalism was a philosophical, social, and literary movement that was most popular from about 1835 to 1860. This was an idealistic movement which said people were basically good and that each individual was important because God was within each individual soul or heart.

The *Transcendentalists* believed that answers to questions about *Truth*, *Life*, and *Everyday Living* could be found in the individual's heart because God was there. Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose essay *Nature* in 1836 is said to mark the beginning of Transcendentalism in America, referred to God as the Over-Soul because he believed that God was "part and parcel" of everything in the Universe. According to the Transcendentalists, the individual did not have to depend on others for answers if he or she were honest and did not run from the truth.

The Transcendentalists believed that Nature should be studied and cherished and was essential in finding the answers to questions about *Truth*, *Life*, and *Everyday Living* because Nature was God's direct creation, unblemished by the hand of humanity.

The Transcendentalists have been very important in American literature. Two of the greatest non-fiction writers, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, were Transcendentalists. Thoreau's most famous book is *Walden, or Life in the Woods*. Emerson today is most famous for his essays and lectures, such as *Nature*, *Self-Reliance*, *The American Scholar*, and *The Divinity School Address*, among many others.

Other important Transcendentalists are Margaret Fuller and Bronson Alcott. Fuller was a writer, teacher, social reformer, and feminist. Alcott was first and foremost a teacher who was far ahead of his time.

The Transcendentalists were deeply involved in the abolition of slavery, at times risking their personal safety and freedom to help slaves escape on the Underground Railroad. The most persistent of the abolitionists among the Transcendentalists was Theodore Parker, who helped finance John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry.

The movement to conserve our natural resources and preserve our environment can be traced to Thoreau. He was the inspiration for such great conservationists and environmentalists as John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson, among others. Thoreau also wrote about *Civil Disobedience*, which the Mahatma Gandhi used in India to help his people gain independence from the British Empire, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used in America's civil rights struggles of the 1950's and 1960's.

Transcendentalism Quiz, English 11S

1. In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson tells us that the words "Trust thyself" vibrate to an _____.
2. In the same essay, Emerson tells us that "to be great is to be _____."
3. According to Emerson, what lesson about how to live can the rose teach us?
4. According to Emerson, "if we live truly, we shall _____."
5. Henry David Thoreau, in his book *Walden*, tells us that "most men lead lives of _____."
6. Give three reasons why Thoreau went to live in the woods by Walden Pond.
7. Why did Thoreau finally leave the woods after two years and two months?
8. What does Thoreau say he learned from his "experiment" in living at Walden Pond?
9. When was Transcendentalism most popular?
10. What does Transcendentalism have to say about people?
11. According to the Transcendentalists, where could the answers to questions about Life and Truth be found?
12. What did the Transcendentalists believe should be studied and cherished because it was God's direct creation, unblemished by the hand of humanity?
13. List three of Emerson's essays.
14. Which of the Transcendentalists was primarily a teacher?
15. Which of the Transcendentalists was a social reformer and feminist?

The Cosmopolitans and World View

The Cosmopolitans

Throughout the history of western civilization, there have been people memorable for their range and depth of knowledge. Because of their brilliance, insight, and hard work, they were able to become experts in the major fields of knowledge in existence during the times in which they lived. These people are called *Cosmopolitans* (from the Greek words *kosmos*, which means “universe,” and *polites*, which means “citizen”)

Some of these Cosmopolitans were so original, insightful, and ultimately persuasive that they succeeded in changing the way people of their own time and after in the western world perceived the universe. The way an individual perceives the universe (the laws that govern it, what it’s composed of, etc.) is called *World View*.

Here is a partial list of the great Cosmopolitans of Western Civilization:

1. **Aristotle (384-322 BC, Greece):** Student of the philosopher Plato and tutor of Alexander the Great. Aristotle’s treatises on science, philosophy, art, and literature so influenced the Ancient World that his name is given to that historical era’s world view.
2. **Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemaeus) (Second Century AD, Alexandria, Egypt):** His theories about the nature of the universe held sway in Europe for more than a thousand years, and his name was given to the world view of the Middle Ages.
3. **Hypatia (AD 370-415, Library at Mauseion, near Alexandria):** The last guardian of the great library of the Ancient World, her knowledge was so vast that she was accused falsely of being a sorceress and was murdered by those who wanted to destroy the books preserved in the library.
4. **Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519, Italy):** Possibly the most brilliant of all the Cosmopolitans: artist, scientist, inventor, many of his ideas were hundreds of years ahead of their time.
5. **Elizabeth I of England (1533-1603):** Not only England’s greatest monarch who made the small island nation a world power, she also led her people through the late-blooming English Renaissance to the brink of the modern world. She was so accomplished some have claimed (erroneously) that she wrote Shakespeare’s plays.
6. **Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia (1729-1796):** The most important patron of the Enlightenment, she had a brilliant mind and was (for her time) remarkably open-minded. She enthusiastically supported the arts, science, and philosophy.
7. **Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826):** One of the Enlightenment’s *philosophes*, he was a writer, politician, statesman, inventor, natural scientist, philosopher, and architect.
8. **Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790):** Perhaps the most important of the Founding Fathers next to George Washington, and the most important scientist in America in the 18th-century, he was also a writer, printer, inventor, and philanthropist.

The Cosmopolitans and World View

Page 2

9. **Denis Diderot** (1713-1784, France): The leader of the Enlightenment's *philosophes* (from the Greek for "lover of knowledge") and the person responsible for the first comprehensive encyclopedia in the western world.

10. **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749-1832, Germany): The last of the Cosmopolitans, he was a poet, playwright, philosopher, and natural scientist.

Why have there not been any Cosmopolitans since Goethe? By definition, a Cosmopolitan has to be well-versed in most if not all of the major fields of knowledge known to exist in his or her lifetime. Simply speaking, the tremendous advances in technology and science that have taken place in the past 150 years have made it impossible for one person to have such a wide field of expertise. This is the *Age of Specialization*, and certified geniuses such as Albert Einstein have of necessity limited their life's work to one or two major fields, not the five or six that would have been possible in earlier times.

World Views

The following is a summary of the world views that have dominated our western conceptions of reality for the past 2400 years:

1. **Aristotelian**: Ancient World; the earth was believed to be the center of the universe and the human being was thought to be the ultimate in form and beauty.

2. **Ptolemaic**: Middle Ages; the earth was still believed to be the center of the universe, and mankind the focal point of creation. The Medieval Church adopted Ptolemy's view of creation because it agreed with some basic Christian tenets (beliefs).

3. **Copernican**: after Nicolaus Copernicus, the great Polish astronomer who lived from 1473-1543, and who demonstrated that the sun was the center of its own solar system, and that the earth was only one of several planets revolving about it. His findings were verified by Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), the Italian astronomer who invented the telescope. The Copernican world view was a key element in the Renaissance.

4. **Newtonian**: after Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) the English mathematician and physicist who formulated the laws of gravity and motion and helped make possible the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment.

5. **Relativistic**: after Albert Einstein's theories of special and general relativity, formulated early in the 20th-century. Einstein (1879-1955, Germany and America) demonstrated that matter and energy were equivalent, which made possible nuclear technology and weapons. He also showed that both space and time are not linear, separate, and infinite, but curved, inter-related, and possibly finite. Einstein's insights and discoveries are the foundation of our modern world view.

Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism

The three great philosophies that influenced people's thoughts, beliefs and deeds in the 1600's and 1700's were **Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism**. The conflicts resulting from these differing world views were not just philosophical; they were often political and were the basis for religious persecutions and even warfare.

The philosophy that was most firmly based on religious belief was **Determinism**, which maintained that people had no free will and were therefore not in control of their destinies. The followers of the French Protestant Reformer John Calvin (Jean Caulvin, 1509-1564) insisted that humankind was innately evil because of the original sin committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and that most souls had been predestined by God for damnation in Hell. The Calvinists believed that only a select few had been elected by God for salvation and eternal Paradise. According to the Calvinists, an individual could do nothing to change this destiny. The Calvinists in England were called Puritans because they sought to "purify" the Church of England of its lingering Papist and Roman rituals. As they became more outspoken and insistent on reform, the Puritans were systematically persecuted in England. A number of them left England for Holland and eventually New England, but the majority stayed and, despite repression, became more assertive politically. Finally, in the 1630's and 1640's, civil war raged in England between the Puritans, who had taken control of Parliament, and the supporters of the king, who had dissolved it. Under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, the Puritans were victorious, the king was beheaded, and the philosophy of **Determinism** became the basis for the rule of law in England until the restoration of the monarchy after the death of Cromwell.

Meanwhile, those Puritans who had settled New England established a *theocracy* (civil government based on the word of God as stated in the Scriptures, Torah, New Testament, or the Koran), which attempted to establish God's Kingdom in the wilds of the New World. This was the first great utopian experiment in America, but hardly the last. The excesses of the Salem witchcraft trials in the 1690's destroyed the Puritan theocracy's credibility.

Other less religious **Determinists** believed that Nature and humankind's place in it were unchangeable. They maintained that since every event has a cause, whenever the cause occurs in Nature, the event must follow. In other words, preceding events determined subsequent events. This reasoning eliminated the possibility of free will and even chance. The individual was caught in a never-ending cycle of cause and effect, action and reaction.

Opposed to **Determinism** were two philosophies which had both basic similarities and striking differences, **Rationalism** and **Empiricism**. Both of these philosophies maintained that individuals had free will and could make intelligent choices based on knowledge and experience. Sir Francis Bacon, an Englishman who lived from 1561 to 1626, stated in his treatise *The Advancement of Learning*: "Let us learn the laws of nature and we shall be her masters." For this quest to discover nature's laws as well as the reasons for human behavior, Bacon advocated the use of *inductive reasoning*, which is the accumulation and classification of specific data from which general principles can be formulated. *Inductive reasoning* is one of the basic principles of our modern scientific method.

Empiricism insisted that all knowledge is based on experience. John Locke, another Englishman who lived from 1632 to 1704, stated in his *Essay on Human Understanding* (1689) that "there is nothing in the mind except what was first in the senses." He claimed that all our knowledge comes from experience and through the senses, and that at birth the mind was "a clean slate which had yet to be written upon."

Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism

Page 2

At the same time, Sir Isaac Newton (English, 1642-1727) formulated the laws of gravity and motion. According to Newton, the physical world was governed neither by chance nor miracle; rather, it operated mechanically under fixed mathematical laws, and under these laws it operated perfectly.

Rationalism, on the other hand, holds that reason is more important than experience in the accumulation of knowledge. The father of modern Rationalism is Rene Descartes (French, 1596-1650), who applied the inductive reasoning advocated by Bacon to philosophy. He is most famous for his statement *Cogito, ergo sum*, which means "I think, therefore I am." Descartes believed that reason existed independently of both experience and the senses. He maintained in his *Essais Philosophiques* (1637) and *Principia Philosophiae* (1644)-- *Philosophical Essays* and *The Principles of Philosophy*, respectively-- that the rational powers of the human mind could discover "the road to truth." He added that at birth the human mind was not a blank slate, as Locke had claimed; rather, it was endowed with a basic *a priori* knowledge, which already existed before the birth of the individual and was common to all humanity. Descartes asserted that this innate and self-evident knowledge could be used by the individual to *deduce* the laws of nature and human behavior. Descartes, then, came to rely on *deductive reasoning* to discover truth.

Simply stated, then, the basic difference between Empiricism and Rationalism is that the former depends on *inductive reasoning*, while the latter relies on *deductive reasoning*.

Rationalism reached its apex during the aptly titled Age of Reason, during which occurred the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment's greatest figure was the French writer, playwright, and philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778). Voltaire was tireless in the rational pursuit of truth and could not abide hypocrisy. For a time he was associated with the *philosophes*, who, under the direction of Denis Diderot (French, 1713-1784), compiled the western world's first comprehensive encyclopedia over a 20-year period, from 1752-1772. Rationalism, then, has the following basic tenets:

- ◆ the universe is governed by discoverable and measurable laws;
- ◆ men and women have free will and are not inherently evil;
- ◆ an individual is not "destined" to be either a slave or a king; rather, a person can make his or her own destiny;
- ◆ if given a decent education and freedom from want, a person can achieve great things in his or her life;
- ◆ people have natural rights, are capable of governing themselves, and government exists only through, in Locke's words, "the consent of the governed."

A number of Rationalists subscribed to a quasi-religion called *Deism*, which held that although God did indeed exist, He did not play an active role in the workings of the universe or in the day-to-day affairs of people. Rather, the Deists believed that God created the laws of nature and its creatures, and gave people free will and the powers of reason to solve their own problems.

The Deists used the metaphor of the clockmaker to explain this. According to the Deists, God was the Celestial Clockmaker who had created a great clock, which was the universe. The

Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism

Page 3

inner workings and mechanisms of the clock were the natural laws of the universe. God, the Clockmaker, had not only created the clock of the universe, but had “wound” it and was now allowing the clock to “wind down” on its own without his interference. The Deists had no churches or ministers, and this “religion” did not last much into the 1800’s; however, Deist ideas found a place for God in a rational world, and also played a role in the development of the quintessential American philosophy--Transcendentalism.

In America, the ideas underlying the Revolution were based on both Empiricism and Rationalism. John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (1690) stated that natural laws governed the political activities of humanity, and that therefore people had natural rights. The founders of the American republic were also greatly influenced by the Enlightenment. Of all the Founding Fathers, the two men who best exemplified the Enlightenment in America were the Cosmopolitans Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson considered himself to be a *philosophe* and counted among his most prized additions to his library his set of Diderot’s *Encyclopedie*. These books are still at Monticello today. Franklin did not accept the Puritan belief in sin and human evil. He said that people “erred” rather than sinned. Franklin felt that people had the capability to make themselves better through hard work, reason, and good will, and, in his own words, “the power of man over matter.”

Study Questions

1. Which of the three philosophies discussed above was most firmly based on religious belief?
2. What is inductive reasoning? Which of the three philosophies relied on inductive reasoning?
3. What is deductive reasoning? Which of the three relied on this type of reasoning?
4. Why were the followers of John Calvin in England called Puritans?
5. What is a theocracy?
6. What event in 1690’s New England destroyed the credibility of the Puritan theocracy?
7. What does *Cogito, ergo sum* mean? Who said this?
8. What is the basic difference between Rationalism and Empiricism?
9. What is the basic similarity shared by Rationalism and Empiricism?
10. What is Deism? Who, in general, subscribed to this “religion”?
11. Which of the above philosophies provided the ideas underlying the American Revolution?
12. Why do you think this period in western history is called the Enlightenment?
13. Who were the two Founding Fathers who best exemplified the Enlightenment in America?
14. Which of these two considered himself to be a philosophe?
15. Which of these two did not accept the Puritan belief in sin?

Essay

In a concise essay of about 350 words, compare and contrast Determinism, Rationalism, and Empiricism. Be sure to have the following in your essay:

- ◆ An introductory paragraph that identifies your topic, provides some basic definitions, and states a thesis. Make sure you underline your thesis.
- ◆ A paragraph devoted to Determinism
- ◆ A paragraph devoted to the basic similarities of Rationalism and Empiricism, as well as their major difference
- ◆ A summary paragraph devoted to the basic differences between Determinism, on the one hand, and Rationalism and Empiricism, on the other.

*The Student's Guide
to
Transcendentalism*

by Michael F. Crim

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"We are limited without, but unlimited within."

What is Transcendentalism?

Transcendentalism is an extremely important element in our American culture. Some of the greatest intellects and writers that America has produced have been Transcendentalists, and their ideas and writings have had a profound influence on the way Americans look at themselves and the world around them. While the roots of Transcendentalism reach all the way back to the Ancient World and stretch from Europe to India, in both its expression and application it is very American.

Transcendentalism holds that the world we perceive with our senses is not all of existence and reality. There is a *transcendent* reality (a term first used by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant) that lies beyond sensual experience. It is in this transcendent reality that the Truth about humanity's place in the universe, humanity's relationship with God, and the nature of God can be revealed. According to Kant, anything that is transcendent lies outside human experience. If that is the case, how can we connect with transcendent reality and find the Truth?

The Transcendentalists had an answer. They maintained that each individual had an innate ability to transcend, or go beyond, ordinary sensory experience. They called this ability *intuition*. Conscience and morality were present at birth. The Transcendentalists claimed that everyone experiences intuitive insights, but they are mostly unrecognized or disregarded. The person seeking a deeper understanding of his or her existence should be open to these *transcendental experiences*, and while these experiences cannot be precipitated, they can be anticipated. One way to experience an intuitive insight is to clear the mind of all the petty details of everyday life and concentrate on the significant and the important. One of the best ways to do this is by returning to God's direct creation: Nature. The transcendentalists felt that contemplation and study of Nature would cleanse the individual of the accoutrements of the man-made and enable the person's intuition to make its connection with transcendent reality.

The Transcendentalists believed that God was the Universal Being, or Over-Soul, present throughout Nature and in each individual human being. They maintained that each human being had a "spark of the divine" within, and that all people were connected to each other and Nature through the Over-Soul. As a result, Transcendentalists asserted that each individual was not only equal in the eyes of God, but should also be so in the eyes of humankind; further, each individual was important and had the potential for greatness. It is easy to see how they could readily conclude that slavery was therefore evil, women should not be subservient to men, all forms of labor were dignified and all workers should be treated with dignity, that education was a necessity, and that Nature had to be preserved and cherished.

American Transcendentalism is generally agreed to date from the 1836 publication of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*, in which he wrote, "The noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it....Three problems are put by nature to the mind; *What is matter? Whence is it? and Whereto?*" (R. W. Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, The Library of America, page 40) Transcendentalism, then, attempts to define the nature of existence, the nature of God, and the nature of man's relationship with God.

(Handout for college preparatory and advanced-placement students.)

Transcendentalism Factsheet

Transcendentalism was a cultural movement that had philosophical, literary, and social aspects. It was also part of a larger cultural and literary phenomenon now known as the American Renaissance that took place from about 1835-1860. Although those calling themselves Transcendentalists were relatively few in number, their influence has been far-reaching and is still felt today.

Roots of Transcendentalism

- 1) Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781
- 2) German and English Romanticism
- 3) Neo-Platonism
- 4) Deism
- 5) Scottish Common Sense
- 6) American Protestantism and Idealism
- 7) Hinduism and other Eastern religions and philosophies

Major Tenets

- 1) The individual is important, inherently good, and has free will.
- 2) Conscience, intuition, and morality are present at birth.
- 3) The basic truths of existence and human kind's place in the universe lie beyond the knowledge we obtain from our senses.
- 4) Intuition is the tool the individual must use to *transcend* sensory knowledge and perceive these basic truths.
- 5) Within each individual is a genius that is connected to God.
- 6) God is considered to be the Universal Soul, or the Over-Soul, present throughout Nature
- 7) One of the best ways to find our genius and connect with the Over-Soul is by contemplating and studying Nature.

Major Transcendentalists (Major Writings in Parentheses)

- 1) Ralph Waldo Emerson (*Nature, Self-Reliance, The American Scholar, The Divinity School Address, Representative Men, Fate, Journals*, and a number of important poems.)
- 2) Henry David Thoreau (*Walden, Civil Disobedience, Life Without Principle, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Cape Cod, The Maine Woods, Journals*)
- 3) A. Bronson Alcott (*Record of a School: Conversations with Children on the Gospels*)
- 4) Margaret Fuller (*Woman in the Nineteenth Century, Summer on the Lakes*, editor of *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist periodical)
- 5) Elizabeth Peabody (*A Last Evening with Allston, Chronological History of the United States*)
- 6) Theodore Parker (*Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion, Letter to the People of the United States Touching the Matter of Slavery, Massachusetts Quarterly Review*)
- 7) William Ellery Channing (*Poems of Sixty-Five Years; Thoreau, the Poet-Naturalist*)
- 8) George Ripley, President of Brook Farm communal living experiment (*Discourses on the Philosophy of Religion*)

Transcendentalism's Influence

- 1) Abolition (Anti-Slavery Movement in the United States)
- 2) Utopianism (Brook Farm, Fruitlands)
- 3) The Decades-Long Campaign for Women's Suffrage and Equal Rights
- 4) Environmental Movement
- 5) American Civil Rights Movement (specifically, Thoreau's essay *Civil Disobedience*, which influenced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and also influenced Gandhi in his struggle for Indian independence from Britain.)
- 6) American Literature (especially Walt Whitman, and, to a lesser extent, Emily Dickinson)

Transcendentalism Is...

*“Shall we say, then, that Transcendentalism is the Saturnalia or excess of Faith; the presentiment of a faith proper to man in his integrity, excessive only when his imperfect obedience hinders the satisfaction of his wish. Nature is transcendental, exists primarily, necessarily, ever works and advances, yet takes no thought for the morrow.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Transcendentalist**

*“Literally a passing beyond all media in the approach to the Deity, Transcendentalism contained an effort to establish, mainly by the discipline of the intuitive faculty, direct intercourse between the soul and God.”—Charles J. Woodbury, *Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson**

*“Transcendentalism did not transform American life, but it did change—and continues to change— individual American lives. Transcendentalism was not only a literary, philosophical, and religious movement; it was also, inescapably, a social and political movement as well. In philosophy transcendentalism taught—teaches—that even in a world of objective knowledge, the subjective consciousness and the conscious subject can never be left out of the reckoning.... In religion transcendentalism teaches that the religious spirit is a necessary aspect of human nature—or of the human condition—and that the religious spirit does not reside in external forms, words, ceremonies, or institutions.”—Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson, The Mind on Fire**

Transcendentalism “means that there is more in the mind than enters it through the senses.”— Amos Bronson Alcott

*“I should have told them at once that I was a transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations.”—Henry David Thoreau, *Journal**

*“Transcendentalism was a reaction against both Unitarianism and Trinitarianism, neither of which possessed any belief in the self-sufficiency of the human mind outside of revelation. It spoke for an order of truth that transcended, by immediate perception, all external evidence.”— Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England**

The Essential Emerson and Thoreau

"The gifted man is he who sees the essential point and leaves all the rest aside."

Thomas Carlyle, *The Hero as Poet*

Emerson's Importance...

- ◆ The driving force of American Transcendentalism, which played a key role in arousing the nation's conscience and re-directing the American consciousness toward equality of opportunity.
- ◆ Nineteenth-century America's foremost philosopher, explaining clearly the difference between Materialism and Idealism and demonstrating the existence of transcendent reality.
- ◆ His essays and lectures defined American individualism and expressed the optimism of human potential.
- ◆ The friend and supporter of Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, A. Bronson Alcott, Theodore Parker, and many other Transcendentalists.

The Essential Emerson...

Essays and Addresses that need to be read to gain a basic understanding of Emerson's Idealist philosophy:

- ◆ *Nature*
- ◆ *Self-Reliance*
- ◆ *The American Scholar*
- ◆ *The Divinity School Address*
- ◆ *Representative Men*
- ◆ *Fate*

Recommended books about Emerson:

- ◆ Allen, Gay Wilson. *Waldo Emerson*. New York: Penguin Books, 1981.
- ◆ Baker, Carlos. *Emerson Among the Eccentrics*. New York: Viking, 1996.
- ◆ Richardson, Robert D., Jr. *Emerson, The Mind on Fire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Thoreau's Importance...

- ◆ Author of *WALDEN; or, LIFE IN THE WOODS*. One of the most important non-fiction books written by an American, it demonstrates how the tenets of Transcendentalism can be applied to the practical concerns of everyday life, and firmly establishes the importance of nature in living that life.
- ◆ Author of *Civil Disobedience*, which greatly influenced both the Mahatma, Gandhi, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- ◆ The fountainhead of the environmental movement, whose writings inspired John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and many others.
- ◆ One of the foremost Naturalists of the nineteenth century, whose discoveries and observations have in most instances stood the test of time.

The Essential Thoreau...

Books and essays that need to be read to gain a basic understanding of Thoreau:

- ◆ *WALDEN; or, LIFE IN THE WOODS*
- ◆ *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*
- ◆ *The Maine Woods*
- ◆ *Civil Disobedience*
- ◆ *Life Without Principle*
- ◆ *Faith in a Seed*

Recommended books about Thoreau:

- ◆ Harding, Walter. *The Days of Henry Thoreau*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- ◆ Hicks, John H. *Thoreau in Our Season*. The University of Massachusetts Press, 1962.
- ◆ Richardson, Robert D., Jr. *Henry Thoreau, A Life of the Mind*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Poems by Emerson

from Threnody

(Written in memory of Emerson's son Waldo, who died of scarlet fever in 1842 at age five.)

The South wind brings
Life, sunshine and desire
And on every mount and meadow
Breathes aromatic fire;
But over the dead he has no power,
The lost, the lost, he cannot restore;
And, looking over the hills, I mourn
The darling who shall not return.
I see my empty house,
I see my trees repair their boughs;
And he, the wondrous child,
Whose silver warble wild
Outvalued every pulsing sound
Within the air's cerulean round,
The hyacinthine boy, for whom
Morn might well break and April bloom,
The gracious boy, who did adorn
The world whereinto he was born,
And by his countenance repay
The favor of the loving Day,
Has disappeared from the Day's eye;
Far and wide she cannot find him;
My hopes pursue, they cannot bind him.
Returned this day, the South wind searches,
And finds young pines and budding birches,
But finds not the budding man;
Nature, who lost, cannot remake him;
Fate let him fall, Fate can't retake him;
Nature, Fate, men, him seek in vain.

Study Questions

- 1) Emerson wrote this poem in May, and the South wind symbolizes the return of Spring. Why is this season so painful for Emerson? Cite lines from the poem that show his faith in Nature has been shaken by his son's death.
- 2) A "threnody" is an elegiac poem which mourns the dead. Cite lines from the poem which demonstrate Emerson's grief for his lost son.

Music

Let me go where'er I will
I hear a sky-born music still:
It sounds from all things old,
It sounds from all things young,
From all that's fair, from all that's foul,
Peals out a cheerful song.
It is not only in the rose,
It is not only in the bird,
Not only where the rainbow glows,
Nor in the song of woman heard,
But in the darkest, meanest things
There always, always something sings.
'Tis not in the high stars along,
Nor in the cups of budding flowers,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There always, always something sings.

Study Questions

1. What is the "sky-born music" that Emerson hears wherever he goes?
2. What does Emerson mean when he says he hears this music even in "the darkest, meanest things"?
3. Do you agree with Emerson? Why or why not?
4. Is this an optimistic or a pessimistic poem? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Find and cite an example of personification.
6. Find and cite the alliteration in line five.
7. Find and cite at least one example of parallel structure (to do this you must cite at least two full lines of the poem).
8. This poem, entitled *Music*, is in fact very musical. Find and cite the musical refrain in the poem.
9. The rhythm of the poem is also very musical. Scan the first sentence (that is, the first six lines) of the poem. How many musical "beats" (metrical feet) are there in the first two lines? The second two? The fifth line? The sixth line? What, then, is the rhythmic pattern of these six lines?
10. Find and cite at least three examples of imagery in this poem, and tell what senses are being evoked in each example.

Henry David Thoreau

*He heard the flicker drumming in the wood.
It sounded different. He began to march
In a route step nobody understood....
First he learned, and then he wrote the text.
Next term the course was open to the nation. —Gray Burr, *The One and Only**

At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1817, in Concord, MA
- ◆ Died: 1862, in Concord, MA
- ◆ Transcendentalist, Writer, Naturalist, Teacher, Lecturer, Surveyor
- ◆ Taught at Concord Center Public School in 1837.
- ◆ Founded and operated private school with brother John from 1838-1841.
- ◆ One of the original contributors to *The Dial* in 1840.
- ◆ Became closely associated with Emerson and lived with the Emerson family from 1841-43.
- ◆ Lived in cabin at Walden Pond from 1845-1847, where he wrote *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.
- ◆ Spent one night in jail in 1846 for refusing to pay his poll tax to protest slavery and the Mexican War.
- ◆ Essay about civil disobedience published in 1849 entitled *Resistance to Civil Government*.
- ◆ *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* published in 1854.
- ◆ Publicly defends John Brown in lecture and writing in 1859.
- ◆ Turns attention to scientific observations and writings in late 1850's-early 1860's.
- ◆ Travels to Minnesota in 1861.
- ◆ Dies of tuberculosis in 1862.

Quotes to Think and Write About:

- ◆ *The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation.*
- ◆ *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 left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one.*
- ◆ *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.*
- ◆ *Our life is frittered away by detail.*
- ◆ *A man is rich in proportion of the number of things he can afford to let alone.*
- ◆ *But I would say to my fellows, once and for all, as long as possible live free and uncommitted.*
- ◆ *Not till we are lost; in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves.*
- ◆ *A man must find his own occasion in himself.*
- ◆ *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.*

The Inward Morning

Henry David Thoreau

*Packed in my mind lie all the clothes
Which outward nature wears,
And in its fashion's hourly change
It all things else repairs.*

*In vain I look for change abroad,
And can no difference find,
Till some new ray of peace uncalled
Illumes my inmost mind.*

*What is it gilds the trees and clouds
And paints the heavens so gay,
But yonder fast-abiding light
With its unchanging ray?*

*Lo, when the sun streams through the
wood,
Upon a winter's morn,
Wherever his silent beams intrude
The murky night is gone.*

*How could the patient pine have
known
The morning breeze would
come,
Or humble flowers anticipate
The insect's noonday hum,—*

*Till the new light with morning
cheer
From far streamed through the
aisles,
And nimbly told the forest trees*

For many stretching miles?

*I've heard within my inmost soul
Such cheerful morning news,
In the horizon of my mind
Have seen such orient hues,*

*As in the twilight of the dawn,
When the first birds awake,
Are heard within some silent wood,
Where they the small twigs
break,*

*Or in the eastern skies are seen,
Before the sun appears,
The harbingers of summer heats
Which from afar he bears.*

Study Questions

1. What is the rhyme scheme of this poem? Do you think this unchanging pattern of rhyme adds to or detracts from the overall effectiveness of the poem? Explain.
2. What Transcendental elements can be found in this poem?
3. What are "all the clothes// Which outward nature wears" in the poem's first two lines?
4. Explain what you think this poem means.
5. How many rhythmic beats does the first line have? The second? Is the rhythm's meter rising or falling? This basic rhythmic pattern continues throughout the poem. Do you think this unwavering rhythm adds to or detracts from the meaning of the poem? Explain.
6. Find and cite three examples of personification in the poem.
7. In line 29, Thoreau refers to "the twilight of the dawn." How is this ironic?
8. In a symbolic sense, why do you think Thoreau regrets the passing of the dawn?

Civil Disobedience

Student Handout

Page One

Definition:

Simply speaking, civil disobedience is a refusal to obey one or more of society's laws. This refusal is not criminal in intent. Those who engage in civil disobedience refuse to abide by laws that they find to be morally wrong. It can also result from deep disagreement with a government's actions. Civil disobedience can take various forms—it can be either non-violent or violent, passively resistant or defiantly aggressive, depending on the goals and philosophy of those participating in the civil disobedience. The purpose of civil disobedience in the short term is to register protest against the laws in question or the government; its ultimate goal, however, is to change or abolish those laws, or the government which enacted them. Those engaging in civil disobedience usually are willing either to accept the penalties for breaking these laws, or other consequences of their defiance.

Historical Background:

While the Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau is often credited with originating the term civil disobedience in the late 1840's with his lecture and essay *Resistance to Civil Government*, the concept itself can be found in some of the earliest accounts of Western Civilization. The ancient Greek tragedy *Antigone* has as its major theme the duty of the individual to obey the laws of God over the laws of men. Another classical Greek play, *Lysistrata*, is an anti-war drama. In the *New Testament*, Jesus Himself engages in a violent form of civil disobedience when he casts out the money-changers from the Temple.

The epic poet John Milton placed himself at risk when he published his essay *Areopagitica* in the mid-1600's, which protested the laws restricting an individual's right to conform to the dictates of his conscience, and to express these dictates freely.

The early stages of the Revolutionary Period in English-speaking North America saw both non-violent and violent civil disobedience on the part of the colonists, especially against the Stamp Act and then the Townshend Acts in the 1760's.

In the 19th-century United States, civil disobedience was used most persistently by those who worked and fought for the abolition of slavery, particularly after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. This law enraged many in the North, and participation in the Underground Railroad, a form of non-violent civil disobedience, became a badge of honor for people of conscience.

In the early part of the 20th-century, Mohandas K. Gandhi, inspired by Thoreau's essay *Civil Disobedience*, waged a 20-year battle in South Africa for the rights of immigrant Indians. Unlike Thoreau, who was not a pacifist, in both South Africa and later in India Gandhi consistently adhered to a strategy of non-violent passive resistance, which he called *Satyagraha*, which in Sanskrit means "truth and firmness." After his success in South Africa, Gandhi returned to India where he led a 30-year struggle for Indian independence from the British Empire. His campaign of noncooperation with Imperial authorities and his economic boycott of British products were non-violent examples of civil disobedience. Indians participating in both small and large sit-ins were beaten by

Civil Disobedience

Page Two

Student Handout

British soldiers but offered only passive resistance. A notable campaign of non-violent resistance was the imprisonment of at least 100,000 Indians for breaking the Salt Laws in the year-long Salt Campaign. By the 1930's, Gandhi was being revered as the Mahatma by his fellow countrymen and was considered the spiritual father of India. He then decided to use his body as a weapon, and on several occasions fasted to the point of death before the British gave in to his demands. India finally won its independence after the end of World War II. Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu religious zealot in 1948.

In Denmark during World War II, civil disobedience was practiced against the Nazi occupation in spite of the Danish government's demand that all its citizens submit to the Wehrmacht and the Gestapo. The Danish Resistance did not hesitate to use violence against the Germans when deemed necessary.

In the United States, civil disobedience has been a hallmark of both violent and non-violent protest since the early years of the 20th-century. Labor unions, such as the Industrial Workers of the World and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, used non-violence to further the living and working conditions of its members. The CIO's sit-down strikes in the 1930's led to recognition of the United Auto Workers. The unionization of the auto industry in the 1930's and 1940's was one of the key factors in the rise of the American middle class after World War II.

The American civil rights movement, organized by the Congress of Racial

Equality in the 1940's, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1950's and 1960's, successfully employed creative non-violent protest, both passive and proactive, to achieve its ends, although the reaction was often very violent and lethal. A church full of black Sunday school children was fire-bombed, and three civil rights workers were brutally murdered in Mississippi. As with Gandhi, assassination was the price the civil rights movement's most promising leaders paid for the advancement of African-Americans to full citizenship: Medgar Evers in 1963, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968.

The anti-Vietnam War movement used both violent and non-violent means in an effort to stop the conflict. In Vietnam, a number of Buddhist monks immolated themselves on the streets of Saigon to protest the war. In the United States, the Students for a Democratic Society helped to shut down college campuses through student sit-ins, teach-ins, strikes, and violent take-overs of campus buildings. Thousands of students confronted thousands of National Guardsmen both on and off campus. The National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam organized mass rallies, including one that shut down Washington, D.C. So many protesters were arrested in Washington on May Day, 1971, that the Redskins football stadium was pressed into service as a make-shift jail. The other side was just as violent, as evidenced by the repeated clubbing and tear-gassing of demonstrators and the killings of four students at Kent State University in Ohio by the National Guard in 1971.

Civil Disobedience

Page Three

Student Handout

Since the end of the Vietnam War, Americans of all political, religious, and cultural persuasions have employed civil disobedience to protest what they consider to be the government's illegal, immoral, or unconstitutional actions. These protesters routinely go to jail for their beliefs. Their actions have often been non-violent, though usually not passive. The last quarter-century has seen an increasingly militant, aggressive, and proactive form of civil disobedience. Demonstrations that would begin non-violently would quickly degenerate into violent confrontations, resulting not only in the arrest of the demonstrators but also in physical injury and destruction of property. In the 1970's and early 1980's those practicing civil disobedience were more often on the left of the political spectrum, actively confronting supposed polluters, opposing the construction of nuclear power plants or the clear-cutting of redwoods, or demonstrating against nuclear weapons. In the late 1980's and well into the 1990's, those involved in civil disobedience have been most frequently on the political right. Anti-abortion groups, citing a higher moral law that cannot be compromised, have carried on an increasingly militant and at times violent campaign to shut down every abortion clinic in the United States, despite the fact that these clinics are legal. Some of those engaged in the militia movement have openly disregarded state and federal law, insisting that today's standing government is unconstitutional and does not have to be obeyed. An on-going protest closely related to the militias is the common law movement, which has conducted an

organized campaign of harassment against county, state, and federal officials, especially in the western states. The federal government has at times reacted violently, as evidenced by the killings at Ruby Ridge in the early 1990's.

Thoreau's Legacy:

Henry David Thoreau's legacy to those who in the past 100 years have sought to resist civil government on moral and ethical grounds is immense. The uncompromising ideas he expressed with such transcendent power in the essay now called *Civil Disobedience* have been both the inspiration and blueprint for some of the world's great social activists. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote,

During my early college days I read Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience for the first time. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. I became convinced then that non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. No other person has been more eloquent and passionate in getting this idea across than Henry David Thoreau. As a result of his writings and personal witness we are the heirs of a legacy of creative protest. It goes without saying that the teachings of Thoreau are alive today, indeed, they are more alive today than ever before. Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a freedom ride into Mississippi, a peaceful protest in Albany, Georgia, a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, it is an outgrowth of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice. (Albany, Georgia; September, 1962.)

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A. Bronson Alcott

"Genius has two faces, one toward the infinite God, one towards men."

—Bronson Alcott

At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1799, in Wolcott, Conn.
- ◆ Died: 1888
- ◆ Educator, Transcendentalist, Utopian, Lecturer, Writer, and Philosopher
- ◆ Abolitionist, Social Reformer
- ◆ Wrote *Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction* (1830).
- ◆ Operated progressive Temple School from 1834-1839 with the assistance of first, Elizabeth Peabody, and then, Margaret Fuller.
- ◆ One of the ten original members of the Transcendental Club, founded in 1836.
- ◆ *Orphic Sayings* published in the first issue of *The Dial* in July, 1840.
- ◆ Conducted utopian experiment at Fruitlands with family and like-minded associates in 1843.
- ◆ Moved his family to The Hillside in Concord, Mass., 1845.
- ◆ Moved into and began restoration of Orchard House in Concord in 1857, where daughter Louisa May Alcott wrote the novel *Little Women*.
- ◆ Became superintendent of schools in Concord in 1859.
- ◆ Founded Concord School of Philosophy in 1879, which he conducted every summer until his death in 1888.

In Depth...

Today Bronson Alcott is mainly remembered as the father of author Louisa May Alcott, but his legacy to American culture has proven to be far more important than his daughter's. He was born in 1799 in Wolcott, Connecticut, and given the name Amos B. Alcox, which he eventually changed to Alcott when he started his career as a teacher. Because his family was poor, he was denied a formal education, and as a young man worked as a peddler in Virginia. Throughout his adult life, Alcott demonstrated poor business abilities, and he made a bare living as a traveling salesman. Yet he had a brilliant mind and an intense intellectual curiosity, and he profited greatly from the access he was often given to plantation libraries, which was the true beginning of his life-long self-education.

After Emerson and Thoreau, he was the most influential of the Transcendentalists and the movement's truest believer. He was a close friend of and inspiration to Emerson, a founding member of the Transcendental Club, a contributor to *The Dial*, and the founder of the Concord School of Philosophy, which he based on Transcendentalist ideas.

His theories about the education of children were far ahead of their time, and while the controversies surrounding his schools in the 1830's caused their premature closing, his pioneering experiments in teaching small children were eventually vindicated and their effects far-reaching. He was an early proponent of the equal education of men and women, physical education for women, the education of African-Americans, and racially integrated schools. He insisted that children had as much to teach as to be taught.

Though a loving father and faithful husband, he was not a good provider for his family, unwilling to compromise his values for material well-being, and often dependent on the good will of others, such as Emerson, for simple survival. This could be seen in his ill-advised utopian experiment at Fruitlands in 1843, which failed in less than a year. This failure caused Alcott to fall into a deep depression and necessitated the rescue of his family by Emerson from malnutrition and exposure during a deadly winter.

Margaret Fuller

"Each moment is an age between me, and the consummation of my existence."
Margaret Fuller's *Journal*, January, 1841

At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1810, Cambridgeport, Mass.
- ◆ Died: 1850, in shipwreck off coast of Fire Island, New York
- ◆ Transcendentalist, Feminist, Writer, Editor, Teacher.
- ◆ Meets Emerson in July, 1836.
- ◆ Teaches languages at Alcott's Temple School in 1836.
- ◆ Becomes Principal Teacher at the Greene Street School in Providence, R.I., in 1837.
- ◆ Begins first "Conversations" at Elizabeth Peabody's bookstore in Boston in 1839.
- ◆ Assumes editorship of the *Dial* in 1839; it premieres in 1840. Resigns in 1842.
- ◆ Continues "Conversations" from 1841-1844.
- ◆ *Summer on the Lakes* published in 1844; *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* published in 1845; and *Papers on Literature and Art* published, 1846.
- ◆ In Italy in 1847 she marries Giovanni Ossoli; gives birth to son Angelo in 1848.
- ◆ Directed hospital during French siege of Rome in 1849.
- ◆ *Special Correspondence of the Tribune* published in 1850.
- ◆ Dies with husband and son in wreck of the *Elizabeth* in 1850.

In Depth...

One of the most important women of her age, Margaret Fuller fulfilled the promise of the Transcendentalist life. She refused to submit to the limits placed upon women 150 years ago, taking to heart and fulfilling Emerson's dictum from his essay *Self-Reliance*, "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world."

The suffrage she desired entailed more than just the right to vote and to own property. She sought liberation from the entire spectrum of masculine hegemony in place in the nineteenth century.

Jeffrey Steele, in his introduction to *The Essential Margaret Fuller*, asserts that the death of her father in 1835 from cholera, though tragic, became her point of departure from the masculine world view. Timothy Fuller "was an affectionate but demanding parent who held Margaret, his oldest child, to an unusually high standard of intellectual and personal discipline...unique among women of her age, leaving her with the difficult challenge of balancing the demands of analytical rigor against the emotional necessities of her experience." (Page xii) According to Steele, in 1840-1841 Fuller discovered what he describes as a "maternal realm," which "envisioned an economy based upon the 'free flow of life' and the interconnecton of friends," in contrast with Emerson's stoic self-reliance. ("Intro." xvii)

Her ultimate rejection of the masculine perspective in favor of a feminist set of constructs is in the truest sense Transcendental. She broke through the boundaries that had been set for women by male-dominated custom, law, and tradition and established new parameters of feminine experience, making her one of the fountainheads of American feminism.

Theodore Parker

At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1810, Lexington, Mass.
- ◆ Died: 1860, of tuberculosis in Florence, Italy.
- ◆ Clergyman, lecturer, writer, editor, reformer, supporter of women's rights, abolitionist, major supporter of John Brown.
- ◆ Largely self-educated, briefly attended Harvard Divinity School, ordained Unitarian minister.
- ◆ Rejected basic Unitarian doctrines but refused to resign the ministry. His sermon *On the Transient and Permanent in Christianity* (1841), was the first pronouncement of his radical religious beliefs.
- ◆ Started preaching at the large Twenty Eighth Congregational Society in Boston in 1845.
- ◆ Member of the Transcendental Club; contributor to *The Dial*.
- ◆ Editor of the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, 1848-1850.
- ◆ Became active in the Underground Railroad; wrote anti-slavery tract *Letter to the People of the United States Touching the Matter of Slavery* in 1848.
- ◆ Member of the Secret Six Committee that funded John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in 1859.

In Depth...

More than any of the other Transcendentalists—Emerson, Alcott, Fuller, even Thoreau—Theodore Parker lived the Transcendentalist life. He believed in the worth of the individual regardless of race or sex, and had no hesitancy in those beliefs, as Emerson hesitated in the equality of women. He was one of the foremost orators of his day, attracting hundreds to his Sunday sermons for the Twenty Eighth Congregational Society held at the Melodeon in Boston in the 1840's and 1850's. During his lifetime he was much more well known and influential than Thoreau. Parker's fervent abolitionism led him to support John Brown with deeds as well as words. He was one of the Secret Six Committee that helped to fund Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859, one of the catalysts of the Civil War.

As William B. Cairns, in his *A History of American Literature* (1912), points out, "He had the power which belongs to a self-educated man with a vast store of facts which he can command and use at will....He was an attractive and forceful man, able and sincere, and he contributed something to the development of religious thought." (Pages 249-250)

Unitarianism, founded in reaction against the Calvinist doctrines of the 17th and 18th centuries, by the mid-19th century was coming under attack because to some the mixture of rationalism and spiritualism was not spiritually satisfying. Emerson had renounced his Unitarian ministry because he felt that the religion was lifeless. According to Catherine Rivard, in her informative booklet *American Transcendentalism, A Brief Overview*, Parker "found Unitarianism cold and formal, appealing to the mind but not the heart." (Page 16) In 1841 Theodore Parker expressed his dissatisfaction with Unitarianism as it was then constituted in his sermon *On the Transient and Permanent in Christianity*. In it, Parker maintained that there existed a difference between what Jesus had originally taught and the forms, doctrines, and denominations that had evolved over the past 18 centuries. According to Parker, these religious practices were transient, while Christ's original teachings were permanent.

(Student Handout)

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody

At a Glance...

- ◆ Born: 1804, in Billerica, MA
- ◆ Died: 1894
- ◆ Teacher; Writer; Owner of Boston bookstore, on West Street close to Boston Common, where Transcendentalists and many others involved in the New England Renaissance frequently met, where plans for Brook Farm were considered, and where *The Dial* was published. Margaret Fuller held her *Conversations* at the bookstore starting in 1839.
- ◆ Initially taught at mother's school while still a teen-ager, then opened a school with her sister Mary.
- ◆ Assisted Bronson Alcott at the experimental Temple School in 1834-1835.
- ◆ Returned to teaching after fire destroyed bookstore in 1844.
- ◆ Sister Sophia married Nathaniel Hawthorne.
- ◆ Sister Mary married Horace Mann, educator.
- ◆ She was an ardent abolitionist.
- ◆ Founded first kindergarten in U.S. in 1860.
- ◆ Lectured at Bronson Alcott's School of Philosophy in Concord from 1879 to 1884.
- ◆ Wrote *A Record of a School* in 1835, about Temple School.

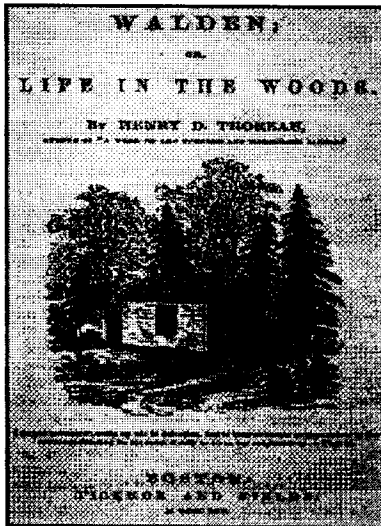
In Depth...

Member of a prominent New England family, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody found herself in the center of the vortex of ideas that swirled around Boston and Concord in the 1830's and 1840's and that is today commonly referred to as the New England Renaissance. While an eager Transcendentalist, her reach extended beyond what was then referred to as the *Newness* to progressive educational experimentation. The role of women in the Transcendentalist movement is often overlooked, and when women are mentioned, the list often starts and stops with Margaret Fuller. A number of women, however, played significant roles, and one of the most important players was Elizabeth Peabody.

She had an early and long-lasting relationship with Emerson that was both social and what today would be termed professional, and she had a close working relationship with Bronson Alcott. In fact, she was the one who introduced Alcott to Emerson, thereby initiating one of the great American friendships of the last century. She also was responsible for introducing Jones Very to Emerson and the rest of the Transcendentalist circle, thereby reinforcing what at times could be a passionately spiritual dimension of the movement.

The Transcendentalists were hungry for English language translations of European philosophical works, and one of Peabody's earliest contributions was to provide Emerson and others with several translations of European writings, such as G. Oegger's *The True Messiah*, which Emerson used to help formulate his notions about the importance of language and etymology. (Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson*, pages 259-260)

In the late 1830's and well into the 1840's her bookstore on West Street in Boston became the touchstone for the Transcendentalists, as well as for others contributing to the literary and cultural American Renaissance which was centered in New England. It was at Peabody's bookstore that the legendary Transcendentalist publication *The Dial* was published. Margaret Fuller presented her series of lectures there starting in 1839; and it was there that plans were laid for the Transcendentalist commune Brook Farm.



Part Three:

Sources

and

Resources

Resources for Teachers Page One

The following resources may prove valuable to those teachers who want to go beyond the information provided in this guide. What is listed below is current as of early 1997.

The Thoreau Society and the Thoreau Institute:

44 Baker Farm, Lincoln, MA 01773-3004

Telephone: 617-259-9411

Fax: 617-259-1470

e-mail: tsattip@aol.com

The Thoreau Society, founded in 1941, has an international membership of more than 1500 people. In partnership with the Isis Fund/Walden Woods Project it operates the Thoreau Institute, which is a research/educational center located at the Baker Farm not far from Walden Pond. The Institute in 1997 will initiate its interdisciplinary summer seminar for local-area high school teachers, to run two weeks and entitled "Thoreau's World and Ours." Succeeding seminars may be open to teachers from other parts of the country.

Membership in the Society is \$35 a year for adults and \$15 a year for students, which includes the quarterly *Thoreau Society Bulletin*, the annual *Concord Saunterer*, and discounts at the Society's Shop at Walden Pond and the Society's Annual Gathering in Concord, which is held around the date of Thoreau's birth on July 11. The Shop at Walden Pond features a number of titles by and about Thoreau, the Transcendentalists, Concord, and the literature and culture of the American Renaissance. A booklist is available upon request.

The Shop's numbers are:

Telephone: 508-287-5477

Fax: 508-287-5620

e-mail: tsshop@aol.com

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society:

Wesley T. Mott, Secretary

Dept. of Humanities & Arts

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Worcester, MA 01609

Telephone: 508-831-5441

The Emerson Society has members in 10 countries. Its \$10 annual dues includes the twice-yearly newsletter, discounts on books and subscriptions, and an annual meeting with panels at the American Literature Association Conference.

For More Information About Concord, Massachusetts:

- ◆ Free-lance writer Cecily Nabors has written an informative and evocative article about Concord, Walden Pond, and the Transcendentalists entitled "On Walden Pond." It appeared in the Sunday, March 23, 1997, *Travel* section of *The Washington Post*. Back issues of the *Post* can be obtained at this number: 202-334-7239. The number of the *Travel* section is 202-334-7750.
- ◆ The Concord Chamber of Commerce is very helpful and can provide up-to-date information about the area. Its address is: 2 Lexington Road, Concord, MA 01742, and its telephone number is 508-369-3120.

Teaching Aids in Print

- ◆ *Approaches to Teaching Thoreau's Walden and Other Works*. Edited by Richard J. Schneider. 223 pages. Modern Language Association, 1996. This is a part of the Modern Language Association's *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* series, and is divided into two parts, "Materials" and "Approaches." The first part provides an overview of Thoreau's writings and his times, including critical commentaries. The second part offers ideas from 24 teachers and is divided into four sections: classroom strategies, a focus on *Walden*, a focus on Thoreau's other works, and methods for teaching outside the classroom. It is available in paperback for \$18, and in cloth for \$37.50. To order by telephone: 212-614-6382; by fax: 212-477-9863.
- ◆ *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism*. Edited by Wesley T. Mott. 320 pages. Greenwood Press, 1996. \$75.
- ◆ *Biographical Dictionary of Transcendentalism*. Edited by Wesley T. Mott. 336 pages. Greenwood Press, 1996. \$79.50.

Wesley Mott is a distinguished scholar and teacher of the Transcendentalism and the American Renaissance. The first volume offers a thorough review of the major philosophical concepts, the periodicals, the major social movements and important events related to Transcendentalism in America and abroad. The second provides information about 200 writers, philosophers, theologians, and others who shaped Transcendentalism in New England. Taken together, these two books offer teachers a comprehensive tour of Transcendentalism. A suggestion to circumvent the expense of these books would be to request the school's library or media center to purchase them for use by both faculty and students.

- ◆ *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*. Edited by Joel Myerson. 225 pages. Cambridge University Press, 1996. Available in paperback at \$16.95 in most major bookstore chains. To order by telephone call toll-free 800-872-7423. This is a highly recommended and very accessible volume that belongs on the desk of every teacher of American literature and/or American history. Several essays dealing with Thoreau the environmentalist and naturalist should be very helpful to teachers of science as well. Part of the *Cambridge Companions to Literature* series, it includes enjoyable and readable essays by some of today's foremost scholars of 19th-century American literature and culture.
- ◆ *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*. Edited by George Perkins, Barbara Perkins, and Phillip Leininger. 1176 pages. HarperCollins Publishers, 1991. Available in most major bookstore chains at \$45 (cloth). This is a fine resource for both teachers and students of American literature and belongs in every high school's media center or library.
- ◆ *The Vision of Emerson*, by Richard Geldard. 186 pages. Element Books, Inc., 1995. Part of *The Spirit of Philosophy* series edited by Jacob Needleman. Paperback, \$9.95 This useful book provides the basics of Emerson's philosophy in understandable language and goes beyond the well-known essays *Nature* and *Self-Reliance* to delve into some of Emerson's lesser-known but still important works. A good Emerson primer for both teacher and student. It also includes a brief chronology of Emerson's life and a tongue-in-cheek glossary of some esoteric Emersonian terms. Highly recommended.

Resources for Teachers

Page Three

- ◆ *Instant American Literature*, by Laurie Rozakis. 236 pages. Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc., 1995. Paperback, \$10. A funny, entertaining and informative book that provides important and useful information about 19th-century American literature, including the Transcendentalists. Highly recommended for both teachers and students.

Cybersources

Note! The following sources were still on line as of June, 1997. There is no permanence in cyberspace. All addresses begin with http://

- ◆ *The Thoreau Institute* (www.teleport.com/~rot/abouttti.shtml): This is not to be confused with the collaborative effort located not far from Walden Pond (see page one). This is an environmental organization based on the West Coast. It believes in environmental protection, but not in big government, and Thoreau is the organization's guiding light. It publishes a magazine, originally called *Forest Planning* but now *Different Drummer* (www.teleport.com/~rot/ddrummer.html) It also publishes an online magazine entitled *The Electronic Drummer* (www.teleport.com/~rot/index.html)
- ◆ *The Thoreau Society's CyberSaunter* (umsa.umd.edu/thoreau/): This is the official website of The Thoreau Society, and it includes information about his life and work, his family and friends, and has an image library.
- ◆ *The Evolution of the Conservation Movement, 1850-1920* (lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/conshome.html): This is a Library of Congress website that introduces the researcher to manuscripts, documents, books, pamphlets, proclamations, prints and photographs, and even a motion picture. Not all of this project can be accessed through the website, but some of it is available to download.
- ◆ *Thoreau's Cape Cod: An Interactive Tour in Words, Photographs, Sound & Video* (www.virtualcapecod.com/thoreau/): This website requires a fast computer (at 133 MHz) with at least 16MB of free memory.
- ◆ *The New England Renaissance, by Mr. (Andrew) Henry's 1994-1995 American Literature Classes, Okemos High School, Okemos, MI* (schc.okemos.k12.mi.us/~henry/): Not all of this comprehensive and impressive project is still on-line, but much of it is and it is worth accessing for both teacher and student. Not only is this a fine research resource, it is an example of what students can accomplish using computer technology. Teachers wishing to contact Mr. Henry for more information about planning, preparation, and materials, can reach him at this e-mail address: henry@scnc.okemos.k12.mi.us.
- ◆ *The Center for American Studies at Concord* (www.dnh.mv.net/ipusers/cas/): This is a non-profit educational corporation, which is seeking to establish a "village university." It has chosen Concord as its site because of the town's central place in American history, literature, and culture. The influence of Thoreau is evident throughout the website.
- ◆ *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (miso.wwa.com/~jej/1emerson.html): This is a comprehensive website created by Jone Johnson as part of the Famous Unitarians, Universalists, and Other Religious Radicals on-line series. A "must-site" for teachers.
- ◆ *The Emerson School in Ann Arbor, MI* (calypso.sils.umich.edu/~ldawson/links.html): This is a fun website for students and teachers established by a K-8 school "based on the beliefs of Ralph Waldo Emerson."

Recommended Readings for Teachers

Writings of the Transcendentalists:

- ◆ By Henry David Thoreau:

Walden, An Annotated Edition. Foreward and Notes by Walter Harding. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995.

The Portable Thoreau, Revised Edition. Edited, with Introduction and Notes by Carl Bode. Penguin Books, 1979. Includes *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, *Walden*, *Civil Disobedience*, *The Maine Woods*, *Cape Cod*, *Natural History of Massachusetts*, *Life Without Principle*, a selection of his poems, selections from his *Journal*, and other entries. A must for the teacher's desk.

- ◆ By Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Essays and Lectures. Edited by Joel Porte. The Library of America, 1983.

Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson, from American Poetry, The Nineteenth Century, Volume One: Freneau to Whitman. Edited by John Hollander. The Library of America, 1993. Pages 254-347.

- ◆ By Margaret Fuller:

The Essential Margaret Fuller. Edited by Jeffrey Steele. Rutgers University Press, 1992. A comprehensive collection of Margaret Fuller's most important writings, including the seminal feminist tract *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

Writings about the Transcendentalists:

- ◆ *Emerson Among the Eccentrics, A Group Portrait.* Carlos Baker. Introduction and Epilogue by James R. Mellow. Viking, 1996. Baker's posthumously published account of the Transcendentalists, with Emerson as the focal point. An engaging book, Baker succeeds in making his subjects sympathetic and real and their philosophy accessible.
- ◆ *The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865. New and Revised Edition.* Van Wyck Brooks. E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1940. The classic account of the writers, philosophers, and doers who helped to create American culture.
- ◆ *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman.* F. O. Matthiessen. Oxford University Press, 1941. A great book which has given the most important period in American literature and culture its name.
- ◆ *Emerson, The Mind on Fire.* Robert D. Richardson, Jr. University of California Press, 1995. An absorbing account of the life of 19th-century America's most influential thinker. Explains the roots and reasons for Emerson's philosophy, and helps the reader appreciate his greatness.
- ◆ *Henry Thoreau, A Life of the Mind.* Robert D. Richardson, Jr. University of California Press, 1986. A beautiful book that captures the essence of Thoreau.
- ◆ *The Days of Henry Thoreau, A Biography.* Walter Harding. Dover Publications, Inc., 1982. A "must-have" comprehensive account of Thoreau's life by the man who, until his death, was the country's foremost expert on the great individualist.
- ◆ *Thoreau in Our Season.* Edited by John Hicks. The University of Massachusetts Press, 1966. The eclectic 1960's anthology that was instrumental in re-establishing Thoreau's significance and relevance for a troubled era in American history. Still must reading for teachers and students alike.

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