

# Transcendentalism in america essay examples

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Transcendentalism has been regarded as an American philosophy and idea that states that both women and men have knowledge about their existence and are conscious of the world around them, in a manner that transcends their senses. According to Brodrick (2010), the knowledge of self and the environment is realized through either imagination or intuition and not through the senses or logic. Reuben (2011) regards transcendentalism as a spirituality and state of mind that prompts the person to go outside his/her senses, shun corruption, and materialism, and gets united with nature. This ideology started in the 19th century. Some of the proponents of transcendentalism include Henry Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Emerson among others. These philosophers wrote essays that were meant to discourage Americans for imitating Europe and expecting inspiration from them. Transcendentalism as an idea was mainly instigated by increased urbanization, conflicts and war, class systems, greed, and hunger for freedom from the past. The first proponents of the idea encouraged people to examine themselves and look into the nature to find answers to baffling issues about life (O'grady).

There was also the belief that any human being, whether man or woman, is always a spiritual being at the center of the cosmos. This is because the universe has a way of duplicating the makeup and image of the self. Thus, the idealists put forward that all knowledge sprouts from knowledge of self and this “ self-knowledge” brings forth self-awareness, happiness and onset of reconciliation with nature. Transcendentalism (Reuben) was associated with beliefs as Puritanism (principle of heavenly light), Quaker (doctrine of inner light), Unitarianism (moral light), and Romanticism (nature is a live

mystery).

For one to be considered a transcendentalist, he/she must be able to accept the ideas and viewpoints not as religion-based beliefs, but as an approach to gain profound insight on life relationships (Brodrick). Transcendentalism as a philosophy set pace in Renaissance and a different thought process in art, music, poetry, and literature.

Transcendentalism as a philosophy received both criticisms and merits. For example, it was praised for being an idea that persuaded its audience to be creative, confident, and endeavor to seek social justice. The philosophy also encouraged the need to have self identity and proper knowledge of the self. This idea also promoted self-reliance (authority of self to thinking) and meditation over truth, goodness, beauty, and nature in general.

Transcendentalism brought the liberalism in religion and protection of women's rights. It also led to the inclusion of logic and thoughts about nature in technology and science. As a result, some achievements like establishment of schools like the Concord School of Philosophy and movements like New Thoughts were realized. However, proponents of this idea have been criticized for being caught between common sense and imagination. Their philosophies and ideas would have been more sound and factual if there were consistency in their empiricism or idealism (O'grady; Reuben). According to Brodrick (2010), proponents of transcendentalism did not succeed in fully developing a theory based on absolute reality of consciousness, beauty, morality, and nature. Besides, there was no firm ground established for actual practice. However, a significant proportion of philosophers and theorists still feel there was no need to do so. This is

because individuals can still appreciate innovation, morality, beauty, and consciousness of nature through daily, self practices.

Chris McCandless is one American who sought to re-invent and regain self-awareness. He was inspired by proponents of transcendentalism including Emerson and Thoreau to be self reliant in thought and practice. Thus, he made some kind donations to charity and left other assets for the boondocks in Mt. McKinley. This is one American who yearned to be a transcendentalist by seeking a relaxing atmosphere that can also provide inner peace. He never allowed anything, including his life to prevent him from achieving what he wanted. He refused to conform to the expectations of the society and other individualistic attributes thwart his efforts to become transcendentalist. Chris demonstrated true transcendentalism by refusing individualism, materialism, seeking the truth and knowledge, and refusing to conform. Apart from being a spiritual idealism, transcendentalism is also a philosophy that has greatly influenced literature in the United States (US). As an idea, transcendentalism has led to a platform in which categories of ideas and knowledge can be exchanged (Brodrick; O'grady). This exchange of facts and ideas, not only helps us to solve conflicts and transcend life struggles, but also bestows feelings of freedom and happiness on one's soul. Most of the proponents of this philosophy wrote many essays and authored several books, for example, "The wild", which are very significant in today's study of American literature. However, some scholars still feel the struggle for transcendentalism has very little theoretical perspective in literature. Nevertheless Thoreau's and Fuller's works (transcendentalists) are a common reading in American schools.

According to Reuben (2011), this principle stimulates imagination and creative thinking which is relevant in the literature and artistic work.

Transcendentalism starts from self knowledge to knowledge of nature about self. Self realization and knowledge about nature are some of the concepts that guide learning and practice of literature in America.

## **Works Cited**

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