

# To write like a transcendentalist

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Upon opening the GoogleDoc that dictated my assignment for the day, I felt instant worry, followed by feelings of inadequacy, stress, and uncertainty.

How was I, a mere high school junior, supposed to imitate the style of great American writers like Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman? After about half an hour of deliberation, I came to a satisfying conclusion. The best way I, a mere high school junior, could show my understanding of these writers' work was through one style only: my own. In all of his work Emerson leaves his readers with one message, think for yourself. In his eminent essay "Self-reliance" he states, "Envy is ignorance, imitation is suicide." I started this essay feeling envy toward Emerson's, Thoreau's, and Whitman's capacity for original, inventive, and insightful work and in my effort to write in their style, I had nothing to show but a blank page and a feeling of defeat. To me the assignment seemed a bit odd.

Had I really understood Emerson's work, why would I spend my time imitating his style? Are my own thoughts not enough? Is the style I'm beginning to cultivate not sufficient? The answer is simple: if I truly wanted to commemorate the likes of Emerson I should not "build the sepulchres of the fathers" but rather stress the importance of myself as an American and as an individual. Why would I copy Emerson when I have the gift of my own experience? As Whitman so eloquently said, "I am large, I contain multitudes." The expanse of my perception, my understanding, and my insight is just as important, if not even more important than that of our great transcendentalist "fathers" because my perception is in this moment and it reflects the now. I rely on my own senses to make meaning of the world

around me. I could read old texts for the rest of my life but could never experience nature in the same way as just stepping outside.

The experience I get from running through my father's farm will always be richer than the experience of reading about what Whitman saw when walking through the hillsides. I do not need Emerson to tell me how to feel, what to think, and how to write, for that I only need myself. Of course, I would have never written this essay or thought in this way had I not read at least a few transcendentalist works. Does that mean this paper is nothing but a faux-product of Emerson's essays, Thoreau's novels, and Whitman's poems? Possibly, but it is my interpretation of the texts that have lead me to this conclusion: that my ideas, my feelings, and my thoughts are just as valid as anything that has come before me. I am not a "mere high school junior" but rather I am an emerging writer who refuses to imitate dead authors, old poems, and venerated novels. In this refusal, I find something that is much more important: myself.