

Emerson and transcendentalist essay sample



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Many people say that an individual is not the center of the universe, but for Transcendentalist believers they thought the complete opposite. In the 1830's and 1840's a group of writers, artists, and reformers flourished with the start of the struggles of a man named Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson inspired many young writers such as Henry David Thoreau and many other who chose to follow the transcendental beliefs, including "Alexander Supertramp". Transcendentalist believed that political and religious institution were not as important or powerful as the individual. They believed that everyone is connected to a greater power who we would later return to after death. Society today is structured where an individual who believes or acts differently is seen as an outcast; to avoid negative outcomes some people see no other option but to fall victim to the conformity, others refuse to abide by the societies "ideals".

According to the Transcendental theories of Emerson, Thoreau and Chris McCandless, people must rebel and turn away from societies beliefs in order to seize the day and make the most of life, but while doing so they must also accept the consequences that come from their actions. Ralph Waldo Emerson, also know as the Father of Transcendentalism, wrestled with his beliefs being a Boston pastor and a strong believer in Transcendentalism. He strongly believed "to be great is to be misunderstood" (Self-reliance). Many people are seen as different because of the way they act, however, to them they are following what they believe in. In Emerson's famous book, Nature, he shows that the peacefulness of nature can ease any troubles caused by the surrounding aggressiveness of conformity.

For instance, when Emerson is surrounded by nature he explains wholeheartedly, “ I feel that nothing can befall me in life- no disgrace, no calamity, which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground...all mean egotism vanishes” (Nature 388). Any difficulties presented in life can disappear if an individual can find peace in nature. Standing alone in the woods, without a care in the world, would leave anyone with peace of mind. Emerson believes that one must rely on themselves in order to achieve success. For example when , he assertively claims, “ A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best...” (Self-Reliance 391). Any one becomes elated knowing that a job is completed because of the hard work put into the project. The final product was the outcome of the beings work creating a sense of accomplishment. Since Emerson is a strong believer in resisting conformity he claims, “ Good men must not obey laws too well” (Emerson).

Some laws may go against an individual belief's and then it up to them if they decide to be true to themselves or be swayed by the opposing forces. By being true to themselves, they accept to disobey the law and then entitling them to accept the consequences. Usually the laws are meant to be kept, but Emerson believes “ Goodmen” are created by forgetting the laws and the beliefs of society. Emerson inspired many in his time period based on his beliefs and personal experiences. Henry David Thoreau was Emerson's most famous believer and follower. Following Emerson's beliefs he wanted to put his thought into action. His actions were extravagant and landed in jail for tax evasion. He succeeded in getting his beliefs noticed but those actions also got him jail; jail was a consequence for choosing to be radical in his

beliefs. His work famous work, *Walden*, described his life while living isolated with only the necessities to survive. In addition, while living isolated he found, “ Our lives are frittered away by detail” (*Walden*) The focus that goes into the details of a small subject affects life harshly.

Thoreau is saying that the details of the little things in life are unnecessary to thrive: all that is needed to become successful are the bare essentials. The world will look less complex without the superfluous clutter . The technology that is suffocating the present society is useless in transcendentalist minds. Analyzing his time at *Walden*, Thoreau enlightening claims, “ If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet a success unexpected in common hours”. Freeing one’s self by rejecting the laws that are put forth allows that person to create their own boundaries, expand on their beliefs, and look at the laws in a new light. Also, continuing his pursuit in his faith of escaping the vice-like grip of society Thoreau patronizes society angrily suggests, “ Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society, deposited at first in the alburnum of the green and living tree, which has been gradually converted into the semblance of its well seasoned tomb-herd perchance gnawing out now for years..”.

Society is constricting the individual by covering the facts and twisting them to make others believe their way is correct even though the consequences are causing them to become farther away from their dreams. Together, Thoreau and Emerson were inspiring and unstoppable. Emerson and Thoreau were main parts in the most influential literary and philosophical movement

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in American history, for that reason it was not hard to understand why so many individuals, who enjoyed the idea of freedom and prosperity, followed their words of wisdom to see for themselves what they could accomplish on their own. Alexander Supertramp, originally Christopher McCandles, is one of the many believers of transcendentalist beliefs. *Into the Wild* uses both of Emerson's and Thoreau's ideas to gain the most in life.

Alexander chooses to rid himself of any materialistic contents as Thoreau did and finds himself making his way to Alaska, even though he will be isolated and survive only on intuition and natural survival skills, he finds this opportunity to experience something new and record his findings. For example, after reading the works of both Emerson and Thoreau he demands, "... rather than love, than money, than faith, than fame, than fairness... give me truth". He paraphrases Thoreau demanding to be told the truth than to be lied to and have a life that is based on false ideals that are not his own. Love, money, faith, and fairness cannot compare to the truth of the situation. Secondly, because the transcendentalists believe in a higher power or "Over-Soul" of which everyone is part of, Supertramp solemnly states, "You don't need human relationships to be happy, God has placed it all around us".

Happiness can be found individually depending on the belief a person has of an over-soul. God has a plan for everyone, but a person cannot see the path that is designated for them with all of the useless clutter blocking their path. Finally, keeping with Emerson's belief that a person must rely on themselves if they want something out of life, Alexander calmly reveals, "When you want something in life, you just gotta reach out and grab it". The only person

who can supply the rewards of life is one's self, if there is a dream or belief that is strongly thought of that individual must grab it for himself keeping in mind the consequences that will come with the following action. The Transcendentalist philosophers made a huge impact on many lives not only on Christopher McCandless' life but any other people who thought the same.

Emerson, Thoreau and *Into the Wild* were big contributors of the transcendentalism movement. The idea of becoming an individual made Emerson realize "To become [individual] in a world that is constantly trying to make [a person] something else is the greatest accomplishment". Thoreau and *Into the Wild* supported Emerson and transcendental beliefs by agreeing that one must rebel against the ideals of a group of constrictors to become a unique individual who can accomplish anything, without the help of anyone else but themselves, or technological devices, that would tempt the individual to take the easy way out of a solution, disqualifying them from satisfaction of success on a personal level.