

Transendentalism paper



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Transcendentalism, a literary, philosophical, and religious movement, rose in New England in the mid nineteenth century. Transcendentalism first started as a religious concept, then transformed to the ideas of American democracy and literature. This was the first distinctive movement for American individualism. Transcendentalists believed that this literature gave Americans the idea of nature being divine and the human soul as wise. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are the epitome of Transcendentalist beliefs and were famous during this era of literature. Both men have a strong belief in human spirit and believe that people can control their own conscience. Henry David Thoreau's mission of simplifying his life by living in the wilderness expressed a concern that was very common to Transcendentalists that contemporary life was demeaning the human spirit. In Henry David Thoreau's journal, *Walden*, his quote, " I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front the only essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (Thoreau 237) shows the ideals of self-reliance, importance of nature, and free thought. This quote of Thoreau's accurately represents the importance of self-reliance in Transcendentalism. This desire to " live deliberately" in solitude apart from society, is something that forces self-reliance. To be apart from civilization requires a form of self- reliance. In Thoreau's opinion , society corrupts a person's influence. Living in solitude emphasizes reliance on oneself, and makes one man learn how to think for himself away from the comfort of society. This is what he means when he says, " discover that I have not lived. " It sets an example that society will change the way people will think, and men will now live until they find themselves. By doing this, they are able to learn how to live. Self- reliance is

the idea that a person should rely on their thoughts and abilities and not become naive to society. While one major ideal expressed in this quote is self-reliance, another is the importance of nature. Henry David Thoreau's thought signifies the importance of nature. Thoreau faces the "essential facts of life," meaning to deal only with the important ideas of life. He gave up the luxuries of the corrupt life he was living and went into the woods to clear his mind and soul. Thoreau wants to "front," or rely on the most basic items needed for survival and thinks that he learned what is at the core of living. Nature is the focal point for Transcendentalists. The beauty of nature is linked to the beauty of the soul. The natural world provides a way to keep humans in touch with their souls and with their spiritual foundations. One can see the importance of nature in Thoreau's words, but also the idea of free thought. Thoreau's quote represents the Transcendentalists' ideal of free thought. In *Walden*, Thoreau tells his audience that they need to partake in enjoying their inner selves based upon his experiences. People need to acknowledge their right to be different and engage in free thought and action instead of falling into social conformity. This is elucidated Thoreau's actions when he separates himself from the norm and pursues what he needs. Society would decry Thoreau's actions, but that did not stop him from living on his own. Free thought in Transcendentalism allows people to up rise and become individuals. This ideal is seen through Thoreau's wise words. Self-reliance, importance of nature, and free thought are all ideals expressed in the quote of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front the only essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (Thoreau 237). Humans are all fallible,

but that should not stop them from exploring our inner selves and reaching our inner peace. Society is a hindrance that makes life difficult, but by connecting with our internal self, people can stay true to who they are. Likewise, nature is an escape from the hassle that society brings us. Taking a closer look into what is seen every day might inspire upon people and make us realize where our endings are in life. This cannot be done without having pride and believing in what we want. Free thought out of all of these is the most important. If people cannot go past what is normal, they are not going to get far in what they want. Transcendentalism is such a great era for human development because it shaped us into better human beings. Even today people are still influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau's work.