

Walden by henry  
david thoreau and a  
walk in the woods by  
bill bryson: comparing  
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According to Merriam-Webster dictionary nature is defined as, "The physical world and everything such as plants, animals, mountains, oceans, stars, etc., that is not made by people." Many people in our society today would say nature is just animals, trees and rocks. Not many people deeply think about what is really out there. There is more to nature than just the basic "green" scenery that most people think of when the question, "What is nature?" is asked. Nature is used to symbolize many things in literature such as, peace, serenity, rebirth, good, calmness, and purity. Nature can symbolize calmness and peacefulness because when you walk into the woods you would mainly see trees, flowers, etc and you would hear the birds chirp or the sound of the wind because it's quiet enough for you to hear rather than in the city it's too noisy to hear the birds. Nature is heavily symbolized in different types of literature work, but it is used greatly by John Steinbeck and Bill Bryson as a way to describe what they felt during their journey. The purpose of this paper is to show how Bill Bryson and Henry David Thoreau used "nature" as a way to symbolize their journeys and adventures through the novels "Walden" and "A walk in the Woods".

William McGuire Bryson, better known as Bill Bryson was born in Des Moines, Iowa in 1951. He settled in England in 1977 and lived in North Yorkshire for almost two decades. He now lives in Hanover, New Hampshire. He is the son of William and Agnes Mary who was of Irish descent. In 2006, he published "The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kids" which discussed about his childhood, which he included his older brother Michael and his sister, Mary Jane Elizabeth. Bill Bryson dropped out of Drake University after attending the school for two years in 1972. On the following year, Bryson and a fellow

high school friend, Stephen Katz, returned to Europe to start his adventure or "backpacking" trip. His travel with Stephen Katz was documented in the novel, "Neither Here Nor There: Travels in Europe". Bryson wrote many books about his travels and journeys throughout his life. His travel books are "The Lost Continent", "Neither Here Nor There", "Notes From a Small Island", "A Walk in the Woods", "I'm a Stranger Here Myself" (aka "Notes From a Big Country") and "Bill Bryson in a Sunburned Country" (aka "Down Under"). His books on the English language are "Mother Tongue" and "Made in America". Some part of Bryson's life took place in the United States of America. Bill Bryson's book, "A Walk in the Woods", was inspired by his journey through the Appalachian Trail with his friend Stephen Katz, during his visit to the United States of America. Later on, Bryson and his family, which included four children, moved back to Britain and now they live in Norfolk.

One of America's most famous writers, Henry David Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817, in Concord, Massachusetts. Henry David Thoreau lived with two older siblings, John and Helen. He also lived with his younger sister Sophia. Thoreau's father worked in a local pencil factory, while his mother rented out parts of the family's home to boarders. Thoreau was a very rounded child with a bright future. He later attended Harvard College, which is now the modern Harvard University. At Harvard University, he studied three different types of languages, which included, German, Latin and Greek. Thoreau graduated late due to his illness that caused him to stop attending class for a while. Eventually in 1837, he graduated from Harvard College. After graduating, he didn't know what to become of himself. With his knowledge and education, most

people during his time would have pursued a career in medicine, law or even in the church. Just like some college graduates, Thoreau pursued his career in education. In 1838, his brother John and him opened a school. In the end the school eventually failed and closed a couple years later. Due to the school closing down, Thoreau later went and worked his father. Thoreau was introduced to Transcendentalism through Ralph Waldo Emerson, whom he met after college. Transcendentalism is the idea, belief or movement that was developed during the late 1820s and 1830s. Transcendentalism stresses the idea of self-reliance, individualism, non-conformity, embracing simplicity, potential through nature and hard work, finding your self to the fullest, and innate goodness for all humanity. Thoreau came to know many of the movement's leading figures, including Bronson Alcott and Margaret Fuller. Emerson was Thoreau's mentor and later Thoreau lives with Emerson for some time. Emerson used his influence to encourage Thoreau's literary efforts. Some of Thoreau's first works were published in *The Dial*, a Transcendentalist magazine. Emerson also gave Thoreau access to the lands that would inspire one of his greatest works. In 1845, Thoreau built a small house on Walden Pond. This land was a property of Emerson. Thoreau spent 2 years there to find a simpler lifestyle. He worked as little as possible and sometimes he would go work as a land surveyor or in the pencil factory. Also, he experimented with the theme, "self-reliance". He grew crops for food and only went into town if it was necessary. Even though he lived a simpler life, he still encountered many problems with law. He was placed in jail for one night because he refused to pay for a poll tax. This experience inspired him to write an essay called, "Civil Disobedience". Thoreau was also against slavery. He wrote many works that fought against slavery, such as "Slavery in <https://assignbuster.com/walden-by-henry-david-thoreau-and-a-walk-in-the-woods-by-bill-bryson-comparing-the-significance-and-symbolism-of-nature/>

Massachusetts". After leaving Walden Pond, Thoreau looked after Emerson's house while he was on tour in England. Still fascinated with nature, Thoreau wrote down his observations on plant and wildlife in his native Concord and on his journeys. Later in life, Thoreau battles tuberculosis, an illness that had caused him great pain and suffering for the rest of his life. While on his trip to Minnesota in 1861, his illness worsens and he finally succumbed to the disease. He died on May 06, 1862, in Concord, Massachusetts.

Bill Bryson uses a lot of imagery to symbolize how nature can provide so much for a person. On the Appalachian Trail, there are many events that occur, such as death and injuries. The wildlife is usually involved in these events. "... his scalp it was dangling from talons prettily silhouetted against a harvest moon" (Bryson, 6). One could visualize a hawk holding on to a human's scalp in the night against the moon. Bryson is trying to say that nature is a beautiful thing that many people miss because they don't actually look at and appreciate what nature can offer to them. There are many different types of scenery that nature can create and offer to one's mind. Just walking along a trail, Bryson sees nature's beauty. " There were long shadows..."(Bryson, 80). Bryson was trying to express that he felt as if the shadows were right next to him as if one is right there along side of him. Bill Bryson, he focuses a lot on nature and how it affects humans. Bryson talks about how many hikers don't make it past the first day and some even quit within the first couple miles on the hikers because maybe they the AT didn't provide them with " proper technologies", "...and they'd walked maybe a mile and a half before quitting. " He said it wasn't he expected it to be. They all say that."(Bryson, 44). He compares how nature is very simple, while the

modern world is very complex and hectic. Many people are too busy that they never thought about the simplicity of nature. With nature there is nothing besides trees, animals, and rocks. The hikers have to get back to the basics and live without worry or any stress for a moment to embrace nature. For example, Bryson talks about how the hikers on the AT usually withdraw themselves for what nature is actually providing them, "... that the whole point of the experience is to remove yourself so thoroughly from the conveniences of everyday life..." (Bryson, 78). He is trying to say that you have to be one with nature in order to appreciate and you shouldn't be distracted on your "smart devices" and just enjoy what is in front of you. He describes how on the AT, hikers become very calm with themselves and nothing could bother them for hours or days because there are no stresses and nothing to bug the hikers. Bill Bryson talks about how nature provides him with solitude even when he is busy. Nature allows the hikers to have their attention on themselves, so at times they don't realize what goes around them. The hikers just wonder the trails like nothing is in their way. For example, during Bryson's journey, Katz asks if Bryson had noticed the fallen tree on the trail. Bryson said he didn't have a clue about the fallen trees because he was so calm that he was too distracted with the peacefulness of nature that he doesn't really realize anything around him. Katz was dumbfounded that Bryson doesn't remember the fallen tree blocking the path. When wondering through nature it brings us humans back to a calm mood. Bill Bryson shows that human relationship with nature has changed throughout the years. Nature has become less respected and used by us humans. Nature is very simple and basic whereas cities are very busy and complex. He describes how we as humans ruin nature. He said that if <https://assignbuster.com/walden-by-henry-david-thoreau-and-a-walk-in-the-woods-by-bill-bryson-comparing-the-significance-and-symbolism-of-nature/>

nature were just left alone, it would be fine. Nature can survive fine, without us humans interfering. But humans think that when they are “changing” something in nature, it is helping nature but actually, humans are actually ruining nature.

The seasonal cycle throughout the book is used by Thoreau to symbolize how nature affected him through his journey. Also, the beginning and towards the end of spring is when world renews itself. Thoreau connects spring to resurrection and renewal and summer to growth. While autumn to maturity and winter to fatality. Thoreau began writing the novel around spring of March 1845. The story started out when Thoreau bought an axe and starts the construction of his cabin. He was determined to go to the woods to get in touch with God and a greater spiritualization of himself. This means that he must get involved with nature and re-identify himself with the basic rhythms of nature and the cycles of the year and days. Thoreau uses two major symbols throughout the book. He uses morning and springtime a lot throughout the book. Thoreau uses these two events as a way to symbolize how nature and during the morning and springtime have an effect on him and the way of life throughout the book. For example, on second chapter, “Where I Lived, and What I lived for”, Thoreau provides us with many examples of how morning time affects him. On chapter 2, page sixty, Thoreau provides an example of how morning symbolizes how a new day is born. ““ I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did” (Walden, 60). This quote symbolizes that a new day is born and there is an adventure waiting out there for him. “ Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me” (Walden, 61). This

quote symbolizes early morning when he wakes up, he is reborn again and the adventures wait for him outside of his cabin with nature. For Thoreau morning is a metaphor for the birth of spiritual enlightenment and a way to learn more about yourself and re-identify who or what you are.

In the first chapter, "Economy", Thoreau had described a half-frozen snake, left by the cold of the winter as "torpid" (Walden, 28). That snake symbolizes the "sleeping" men who remain solid in their "primitive and low condition" (Walden, 28) by saying that those men just do what they are told and just do tradition stuff and now trying anything new "Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man" (Walden, 62). This quote shows that Thoreau compared men who work hard without thinking to the pieces of iron that gird a railroad. Thoreau then insists on that men who work without thinking should be more awakened by spring, to rise to a "higher and more ethereal life" (Walden, 28). Thoreau begins building his house; this is part of his physical counterpart to his spiritual awakening. He constructed his cabin in the woods in the springtime, but does not move into it until summer, when nature and his spiritual self is in full life. The day he moved into his cabin was on July 4th, which is Independence Day. This day symbolizes the day he withdraws and frees himself from society and becomes one with nature. "... and so the seasons went rolling on into summer, as one rambles into higher and higher grass" (Walden, 212). This quote symbolizes that as summer goes by Thoreau increases his spiritual connection towards nature and grows greater as a person. As nature matures toward its summer maturation, the narrator will grow toward his spiritual fulfillment. During summer is when Thoreau is engaged in the construction work and in the



bean fields' cultivation. These are the examples of his self-sufficiency philosophy. But by cultivating beans, Thoreau's purpose is to be more with nature rather than worrying about the economic issues. Also, to show that nature can do many wonders if you just try to be independent and provide for yourself rather than waiting for other people to take care of you. Also, in order to be independent you should be one with nature because "nature" can do many wonders that you cannot see.

Thoreau sees winter as a time period where he would reflect on what happened so far throughout the year and the author likes to reflect with himself indoors rather than outdoors during the cold winter time period. During the wintertime period, he would give himself a task of measuring the pond. This symbolizes how he is reflecting and trying to find out more about his spiritual connection to nature. Then, when winter comes close to the end, spring comes back again and melts away the ice and awakens animals and the spiritual nature world. This is the beginning of a new adventure whenever spring begins to take its course through nature. The second to last chapter, "Spring", is a mantra to the eternal fertility of nature. For example, these quotes, "... the mother of humanity" (Walden, 205) and "the earth is still in her swaddling-clothes, and stretches forth baby fingers on every side" (Walden, 206) show that Thoreau describes nature by using a lot of imagery of maternity and childhood. Also, as the season cycle, Thoreau believes that our life would restart and everything would be new again and it would be like everything is new and fresh. It shows that Thoreau believes that we as humans will have a fresh start again to life as the season cycle around.

Thoreau uses images such as light, fire and sun to describe the arrival of spring. This symbolizes how powerful, active and lively nature's is when the times come. For example, the grass blade, "symbol of perpetual youth" (Walden, 207), symbolizes how when spring comes, "mother nature" is there providing and give off her good vibe to give the land a new life. Also, nature awakes any creatures that slept through the winter and when the arrival of spring comes they come back to life and infest the land around them. The awakening of the creatures and any living thing throughout the land symbolizes the spiritual rebirth for change and for any wrong they did throughout the year. For example, this quote, "In a pleasant spring morning all men's sins are forgiven" (Walden, 209) shows that Thoreau believes that people are forgiven their sins when the arrival of spring comes and it is like if they're a restart to their life.

Animals are used in the book to symbolize the human society. Thoreau withdraw from human society is because he wants to get closer to the natural world. The author describes the animal fine points. He also describes them with the most respectful way he could because he astonish and curious by their beauty. He was interested in observing and watching closely at their behavior patterns. Furthermore, he especially wanted to observe the patterns of the woodchucks, partridges, loons, and mice. He doesn't record down just the animals' behaviors but he also combines their behaviors with human's behaviors. Many of his thoughts are from his imagination. For example, when he sees the black ants and red ants armies at war, he compares that to human's battle. He thinks human only fight for materialistic reasons and not really for a real reason. They only care for they need and

sometimes what they need is not really necessary. In addition, animals symbolize the savage part rooted in all man. Thoreau believes that nature can show the unmodified truths to most things and in order for humans like us to find ourselves or freedom, Thoreau believes that we must give into nature and see the value because he thinks that without nature, one man can not truly find out about himself or discover what he really is capable of doing. He also believes that us human should not just give up or rely everything on one another but actually stand up and physically do it, then we will find our freedom. The most obviously and most important symbol throughout the whole novel is Walden Pond itself. The pond itself has a lot of meaning. It can mean various things because it's a very complex symbol. There can be many points of views or perspectives that people have by just reading the book, but the small body of water can be a symbol of Thoreau's spirit, philosophy or something that he thinks of personally and closely about. He compares the pond to heaven and earth because his quote, "Walden is blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both" (Walden, 119), shows that the pond reflects the sky and earth and this makes it seem like he is comparing humans to the gods. Like how the gods live in heaven and we humans live on earth. Thoreau believes that the pond stays youthful throughout the year because it never changes and once the season cycle it just turns back the way it was. He talks about the pond sleeping during winter because it's covered in ice. Then in spring, it awakes and turns into what it was before. It is like the youthfulness just recycles as the seasons recycle and also he describes the pond as being immortal or they're forever like it every year it would wake back up. "Walden was dead and is <https://assignbuster.com/walden-by-henry-david-thoreau-and-a-walk-in-the-woods-by-bill-bryson-comparing-the-significance-and-symbolism-of-nature/>

alive again" (Walden, 278). According to this quote he believes that it has an eternal life because as the seasons recycle the pond life recycles. It's like he is trying to compare the pond life to human's life. During the summer we gather food and prepare for winter. When winter hits we are confined in our home and wait for the coming of spring. When spring arrives we regain our life back because the snow melts away we are free at least. Then the cycle of seasons just continues.

Both Bryson and Thoreau used their adventures as a way to express themselves and how they feel towards nature. Bryson hiked across the Appalachian Trails while, Thoreau borrowed land from his good friend Emerson to shy away from society and live a similar life by being one with nature. Even though these two authors lived in a different time period and had different approaches on how to attack the journeys, their ideas and appreciation for nature is not much different. They both went on their adventure to be one with nature.