

# **Walden Book Notes**

## **Walden by Henry David Thoreau**

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## Author/Context

Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862) was born in Concord, MA in 1817, and lived all but about two years of his life in the town. After completing grammar school with distinction at Concord Academy, he was admitted to Harvard College, where he did only passably well, preferring, instead of classes, to enjoy the library on his own terms. Upon returning to Concord, he took a job as a teacher, only to leave two weeks later because of his inability to discipline the students. After that he opened a progressive alternative school with his brother John that lasted three years. Following this attempt, Thoreau developed a deep friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson. He later moved in with the man and his family, working both as a handyman and tutor to the elder's children. Although Thoreau proposed to Ellen Sewall, another Concord resident, and she accepted, she was compelled by her parents, who disapproved, to break off the engagement. Thoreau remained single the rest of his life. During this period, Thoreau took a week-long boat trip with his brother that was the subject of Thoreau's book, *A Trip on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. This work proved to be the only one in addition to *Walden* and his short piece "Civil Disobedience" that was published during Thoreau's lifetime. It sold very badly prior to Thoreau's death.

After his time at Walden (from 1845 until 1847), Thoreau spent a couple of years living on Staten Island, acting as a tutor for Emerson's brother, before returning to Concord to live with his sister and parents until the end of his life. Thoreau maintained a close relationship with his brother up until the latter's death of lockjaw following a freak accident. Near the end of his life, he developed a close friendship with John Brown, the abolitionist. Following Brown's death by hanging after the Harper's Ferry Slave uprising, Thoreau fell ill and died of tuberculosis in 1862.

Thoreau lived at Walden Pond from July 4, 1845 until September 6, 1847. He wrote most of the text of *Walden* during that time, but did not publish the book until 1854. Over those seven years, he revised the book seven times, and did not work at all on it during the years 1950-52. During this period, he was also involved in the speaking series at the Concord Lyceum, both as an organizer and regular speaker.

He identified himself as a Transcendentalist, a radical religious and political group that incorporated many eastern ideas, like reincarnation, into their philosophy. Transcendentalists valued individual awakening over group political action. In addition, the group valued intuition and spirituality over empirical thinking. They practiced meditation, and engaged in deep discussion about the process of thought. The group included Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the Alcott family, and a number of other great thinkers of the period. However, like Emerson, Thoreau declined multiple invitations to take part in the Brook Farm or Fruitlands collectives, both of which were outgrowths of the Transcendentalist movement in the Boston area.

In addition to maintaining a close friendship with Emerson, the two started a magazine, *The Dial*, which published many of Thoreau's poems and essays that proved his great skill as a naturalist. Although Thoreau provided the most vivid and well-documented

example of a Transcendentalist life, he struggled most of his life to make a living inside the capitalist system he so despised. Throughout his younger years he worked in the family pencil-making business, and near the end of his life turned to surveying to make ends meet.

Like Angelina Grimke, who was morally opposed to slavery, as opposed to the economics of it, he was equally cognizant of the importance of resistance, even if it led to ostracism or jail, two things to which he was ideologically opposed. Thoreau believed deeply that taxation by an unjust government was immoral. He was arrested after refusing to pay his taxes. Despite these deep political convictions, the great importance of *Walden* was Thoreau's realization of the utmost importance of personal, inner awakening prior to any attempt at political agitation.

Despite Thoreau's great impact on later generations of activists, he struggled throughout his life to gain acceptance and understanding. Thoreau spent much of his life struggling economically, and faced tragedy multiple times. The loss of both John Brown, a great mentor, and his brother and traveling companion (also named John) were difficult for Thoreau. These events, combined with his inability to publish his work, made Thoreau's life a rather quiet and undistinguished one. It was only years after his death that his work was recognized for its brilliance and forward-thinking ideas.

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# Plot Summary

*Walden* is Henry David Thoreau's account of the two years he spent living in a small cabin he built in the woods next to Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. The book roughly follows the seasons of the year, and uses the seasonal changes as a framework in which to talk about wealth, money, academic study, nature, and spirituality. Thoreau begins with a long chapter on Economy, stating his case for moving to the woods, not paying taxes (for which Thoreau was jailed briefly during his two years at Walden), and surviving only off what he grew on the land near his cabin. A life of simplicity, for which he argues in the first chapter, is a recurring theme throughout the book.

*"My purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles; to be hindered from accomplishing which for want of a little common sense, a little enterprise and business talent, appeared not so sad as foolish."* Economy, pg. 51

Over the course of the next 17 chapters, Thoreau considers many aspects of the world around Walden. He allows each thing he spends time examining to take his thoughts towards higher moral and intellectual standards, as well as towards a very honest and respectful celebration of nature. He is particularly excited about the character, appearance, and characteristics of Walden Pond, and spends much of the book both describing the pond and singing the praises of its uniqueness.

Not content to limit his observations to the natural world only, Thoreau chronicles his encounters with many hunters, loggers, and other manual laborers who come to the pond. An entire chapter is dedicated to people who once lived near the pond, but have since passed away. He also mentions some of his closest friends and intellectual partners, who regularly pay visits to Thoreau.

Although Thoreau places a higher value on natural observation than anything else, he also places great weight on knowledge, and thoughtful, careful intellectual argument, which he feels is best undertaken in a natural setting. Thoreau quotes from many spiritual books, including Hindu, Christian, Confucian, and Roman writings. He also treats many books on farming, botany, and other aspects of nature as if they were religious texts.

Thoreau concludes the book by writing about truth, which he feels can be found both in nature, and in people who fully live up to their potential. In addition, he reiterates his feeling that people should never presume to be important or exceedingly valuable until they have succeeded in exploring every part, not of the world, but of themselves. Thoreau says that he left the woods to explore other parts of himself.

# Major Characters

**Henry David Thoreau:** Author of *Walden*. A Naturalist, political activist and frequent speaker in Concord, MA, his home. *Walden* is a journal of his first year in a small shack near Walden Pond with absolutely no luxuries of modern life. Thoreau is most famous for *Walden* and his essay, 'Civil Disobedience.'

## Minor Characters

**Nathaniel Hawthorne:** Novelist, and next owner of Thoreau's boat.

**James Collins:** An Irishman from whom Thoreau buys boards for his cabin. The wood is from Collins' cabin, which he sells to Thoreau, who then dismantles it and carts it to Walden.

**William Ellery Channing the younger:** Poet, close friend of Thoreau's, and a frequent visitor to Walden Pond. Thoreau writes a dialogue between a hermit and a poet, who is modeled after Channing, in Chapter 12. Channing later wrote a biography of Thoreau: *Thoreau, The Poet Naturalist*.

**A Canadian (Aleck Therien):** A wood-chopper who visited Thoreau at Walden in the winter, and whom Thoreau found to be exceptionally pure of spirit.

**Mr. Gilian Baker:** The owner of a fantastic 'winged cat' that Thoreau made a special visit to see, but who was not around when he called. Mr. Baker gave Thoreau a pair of the 'wings' - long, matted flaps of fur - from the cat, which Thoreau kept for years.

**Cato Ingraham:** The slave of Duncan Ingraham, a lawyer from Concord, who lived, until his death only a few years after Thoreau left the woods, in a house built by his owner in the woods near Walden Pond.

**Zilpha Ingraham:** A 'colored woman' who lived for years very near to where Thoreau built his cabin, until her house was burnt by English soldiers during the war of 1812. She sang loudly while at home, and had a shrill voice.

**Brister and Fenda Freeman:** Brister was once a slave of Squire Cummings, but was then freed, as his last name implies. They lived on Brister's Hill, down the road from Walden Pond. Brister fought and died in the battle of Lexington and Concord. Fenda made her living telling fortunes.

**Wyman the Potter:** A potter who had lived very close to the pond, and who sold his goods in Concord.

**Col. Hugh Quoil:** An Irishman who lived in Wyman the Potter's house after Wyman passed away. He was the last inhabitant of Walden before Thoreau moved in. He dug ditches, but had apparently been a soldier prior to that.



**'Another welcome visitor' (A. Bronson Alcott):** A friend of Thoreau's and the father of author Louisa May Alcott. He was a Transcendentalist who spent many evenings talking and debating with Thoreau in his cabin. Thoreau thought very highly of Alcott's character.

**'one other' (Ralph Waldo Emerson):** Another close friend of Thoreau's. He was also a Transcendentalist and hired Thoreau as a handyman. He then connected Thoreau to many publishers, an act that later enabled Thoreau to squat at Walden.

**Sam Nutting:** A hunter who used to hunt bears in Concord in exchange for rum. Bears were no longer seen around Walden

**John Field:** A poor Irish immigrant who lives in the rundown house at Baker Farm.

**John Farmer:** A man who heard a flute one evening when he sat down to think. The flute awakened a different part of himself than his work--the flute brought him away from that sphere entirely, and he began to think about universal truths.





## Objects/Places

**Walden Pond:** The pond in Concord, Massachusetts on which Thoreau built his cabin and squatted for two years.

**The Hollowell Place:** A farm which Thoreau bought before he began his time at Walden. He had just begun to plant a garden when the former owner's wife asked for the place back. Thoreau rejected the ten dollars the former owner offered him in return for the farm.

**Concord:** The town in Eastern Massachusetts in which Walden Pond was located. Also the sight of the first battle of the Revolutionary War.

**Fitchburg Railroad:** Train line that runs along one edge of Walden Pond, to and from Boston on a daily basis. It carries both people and freight.

**Lexington:** A town bordering Concord, also the sight of the first battle of the Revolutionary War.

**Sudbury, Acton, Bedford and Weston:** All towns bordering, or in the vicinity of, Concord.

**Peterboro's Hills:** An area in Southern New Hampshire, visible from Concord.

**White Pond:** A pond located in Nine Acre Corner, in Concord, which Thoreau felt was as pure and clean as Walden, and probably more pristine and beautiful. May be connected to Walden by underground springs. Thoreau calls these two ponds 'Lakes of Light.'

**Saffron Walden:** An English locality that may have been the origin for the name Walden, though Thoreau also thought Walden came from 'Walled-in' because of the rocks lining the entire shore of the pond.

**Fair Haven:** A bay in the Sudbury River, near Walden Pond.

**Flint's Pond (Sandy Pond):** A nearby pond in Lincoln which appears to be connected to Walden by a series of small ponds.

**Goose Pond:** A small pond in between Walden and Flint's Ponds.

**Baker Farm:** A farm about a mile from Walden where Thoreau considered living before he chose Walden.

**Breed's Hut:** The long unoccupied cabin that was the subject of many local ghost stories, as well as an old, possibly fictional tavern. The son of a former inhabitant comes to the house after it is burnt down by local kids, and meets Thoreau by chance.

# Quotes

Quote 1: "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up."

Economy, pg. 39

Quote 2: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" Economy, pg. 43

Quote 3: "I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand at the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line." Economy, pg. 49

Quote 4: "My purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles; to be hindered from accomplishing which for want of a little common sense, a little enterprise and business talent, appeared not so sad as foolish." Economy, pg. 51

Quote 5: "But lo! men have become the tools of their tools. The man who independently plucked the fruits when he was hungry is become a farmer; and he who stood under a tree for shelter, a housekeeper. We now no longer camp as for a night, but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven. We have adopted Christianity merely as an improved method of *agri*-culture. We have built for this world a family mansion, and for the next a family tomb. The best works of art are the expression of man's struggle to free himself from this condition, but the effect of our art is merely to make this low state comfortable and that higher state to be forgotten." Economy, pg. 64

Quote 6: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the 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. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion." What I Lived For, pg. 101

Quote 7: "If we live in the nineteenth century, why should we not enjoy the advantages which the nineteenth century offers? Why should our life be in any respect Provincial?" Reading, pg. 114

Quote 8: "To do things 'railroad fashion' is now the by-word; and it is worth the while to be warned so often and so sincerely by any power to get off its track. There is no stopping to read the riot act, no firing over the heads of the mob, in this case. We have constructed a fate, an *Atropos*, that never turns aside...Men are advertised that at a certain hour and minute these bolts will be shot toward particular points of the compass;

yet it interferes with no man's business, and the children go to school on the other track...Every path but your own is the path of fate. Keep on your own track, then."  
Sounds, pg. 120

Quote 9: "This whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in space. How far apart, think you, dwell the two most distant inhabitants of yonder star, the breadth of whose disk cannot be appreciated by our instruments? Why should I feel lonely? Is not our planet in the Milky Way? This which you put seems to me not to be the most important question. What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another." Solitude, pg. 130

Quote 10: "I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society. When the visitors came in larger and unexpected numbers there was but the third chair for them all, but they generally economized the room by standing up. It is surprising how many great men and women a small house will contain. I have had twenty-five or thirty souls, with their bodies, at once under my roof, and yet we often parted without being aware that we had come very near to one another." Visitors, pg. 135

Quote 11: "He suggested that there might be men of genius in the lowest grades of life, however permanently humble and illiterate, who take their own view always, or do not pretend to see at all; who are as bottomless even as Walden Pond was thought to be, though they may be dark and muddy." Visitors, pp. 141-42

Quote 12: "When my hoe tinkled against the stones, that music echoed to the woods and the sky, and was an accompaniment to my labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop. It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans; and I remembered with as much pity as pride, if I remembered at all, my acquaintances who had gone to the city to attend the oratorios." The Bean-Field, pg. 147

Quote 13: "In one direction from my house there was a colony of muskrats in the river meadows; under the grove of elms and button-woods in the other horizon was a village of busy men, as curious to me as if they had been prairie dogs, each sitting at the mouth of its burrow, or running over to a neighbor's to gossip." The Village, pg. 153

Quote 14: "I did not pay a tax to, or recognize the authority of, the state which buys and sells men, women, and children, like cattle at the door of its senate-house. I had gone down to the woods for other purposes. But, wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society. It is true, I might have resisted forcibly with more or less effect, might have run 'amok' against society; but I preferred that society should run 'amok' against me, it being the desperate party." The Village, pg. 156

Quote 15: "It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonical themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next

cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook." *The Ponds*, pg. 159

Quote 16: "it is the same liquid joy and happiness to itself and its Maker, ay, and it *may* be to me. It is the work of a brave man surely, in whom there was no guile! He rounded this water with his hand, deepened and clarified it in his thought, and in his will bequeathed it to Concord." *The Ponds*, pp. 170-71

Quote 17: "*Flint's Pond!* Such is the poverty of our nomenclature. What right had the unclean and stupid farmer, whose farm abutted on this sky water, whose shores he has ruthlessly laid bare, to give his name to it?...I go not there to see him nor to hear of him; who never saw it, who never bathed in it, who never loved it, who never protected it, who never spoke a good word for it, nor thanked God that he had made it. Rather let it be named from the fishes that swim in it, the wild fowl or quadrupeds which frequent it, the wild flowers which grow by its shores, or some wild man or child the thread of whose history is interwoven with its own; not from him who could show no title to it but the deed which a like-minded neighbor or legislature gave him...." *The Ponds*, pg. 172

Quote 18: "Once it chanced that I stood in the very abutment of a rainbow's arch, which filled the lower stratum of the atmosphere, tinging the grass and leaves around, and dazzling me as if I looked through colored glass crystal. It was a lake of rainbow light, in which, for a short while, I lived like a dolphin. If it had lasted longer it might have tinged my employments and life. As I walked on the railroad causeway, I used to wonder at the halo of light around my shadow, and would fain fancy myself one of the elect. One who visited me declared that the shadows of some Irishmen before him had no halo about them, that it was only natives that were so distinguished. Benvenuto Cellini tells us in his memoirs, that, after a certain terrible dream or vision which he had during his confinement in the castle of St. Angelo, a resplendent light appeared over the shadow of his head at morning and evening, whether he was in Italy or France, and it was particularly conspicuous when the grass was moist with dew. This was probably the same phenomenon to which I have referred, which is especially observed in morning, but also at other times, and even by moonlight. Though a constant one, it is not commonly noticed, and, in the case of an excitable imagination like Cellini's, it would be basis enough for superstition. Beside, he tells us that he showed it to very few. But are they not indeed distinguished who are conscious that they are regarded at all?" *Baker Farm*, pp. 176-77

Quote 19: "As I was leaving the Irishman's roof after the rain, bending my steps again to the pond, my haste to catch pickerel...appeared for an instant trivial to me who had been sent to school and college; but as I ran down the hill toward the reddening west, with the rainbow over my shoulder, and some faint tinkling sounds borne to my ear through the cleansed air, from I know not what quarter, my Good Genius seemed to say - Go fish and hunt far and wide day by day - farther and wider - and rest thee by many brooks and hearth-sides without misgiving. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Rise free from care before the dawn, and seek adventures...Grow wild according to thy nature, like these sedges and brakes, which will never become English bay. Let



the thunder rumble; what if it threaten ruin to farmers' crops? that is not its errand to thee. Take shelter under the cloud, while they flee to carts and sheds. Let not to get a living be thy trade, but thy sport. Enjoy the land, but own it not. Through want of enterprise and faith men are where they are, buying and selling their lives like serfs." pp. 180, Baker Farm

Quote 20: "The governor and his council faintly remember the pond, for they went a-fishing here when they were boys; but now they are too old and dignified to go a-fishing, and so they know it no more forever. Yet even they expect to go to heaven at last. If the legislature regards it, it is chiefly to regulate the number of hooks to be used there; but they know nothing of the hook of hooks with which to angle for the pond itself, impaling the legislature for bait. Thus, even in civilized communities, the embryo man passes through the hunter stage of development." Higher Laws, pg. 184

Quote 21: "We are so degraded that we cannot speak simply of the necessary functions of human nature." Higher Laws, pg. 189

Quote 22: "Digging one day for fish-worms I discovered the ground-nut (*Apios tuberosa*) on its string, the potato of the aborigines....Cultivation has well nigh exterminated it....This tuber seemed like a faint promise of Nature to rear her own children and feed them simply here at some future period. In these days of fatted cattle and waving grain-fields, this humble root, which was once the *totem* of an Indian tribe, is quite forgotten...; but let wild Nature reign here once more, and the tender and luxurious English grains will probably disappear before a myriad of foes...but the now almost exterminated ground-nut will perhaps revive and flourish in spite of frosts and wildness, prove itself indigenous, and resume its ancient importance and dignity as the diet of the hunter tribe." House-Warming, pp. 200-201

Quote 23: "I am not aware that any man has ever built on the spot which I occupy. Deliver me from a city built on the site of a more ancient city, whose materials are ruins, whose gardens cemeteries. The soil is blanched and accursed there, and before that becomes necessary the earth itself will be destroyed. With such reminiscences I repeopled the woods and lulled myself asleep." Winter Visitors, pg. 218

Quote 24: "There too, as every where, I sometimes expected the Visitor who never comes. The Vishnu Purana says, 'The house-holder is to remain at eventide in his courtyard as long as it takes to milk a cow, or longer if he pleases, to await the arrival of a guest.' I often performed this duty of hospitality, waited long enough to milk a whole herd of cows, but did not see the man approaching from the town." Winter Visitors, pg. 222

Quote 25: "Here is one fishing for pickerel with grown perch for bait. You look into his pail and wonder as into a summer pond, as if he kept summer locked up at home, or knew where she had retreated. How, pray, did he get these in mid-winter? O, he got worms out of rotten logs since the ground froze, and so he caught them. His life passes deeper in Nature than the studies of the naturalist penetrate; himself a subject for the naturalist. The latter raises the moss and bark gently with his knife in search of insects;



the former lays open logs to their core with his axe, and moss and bark fly far and wide....Such a man has come to fish, and I love to see Nature carried out in him. The perch swallows the grub-worm, the pickerel swallow the perch, and the fisherman swallows the pickerel; and so all the chinks in the scale of being are filled." The Pond in Winter, pp. 230-31

Quote 26: "While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless." The Pond in Winter, pg. 232

Quote 27: "If we knew all the laws of Nature, we should need only one fact, or the description of one actual phenomenon, to infer all the particular results at that point. Now we know only a few laws, and our result is vitiated...by our ignorance of essential elements in the calculation. Our notions of law and harmony are commonly confined to those instances which we detect; but the harmony which results from a far greater number seemingly conflicting, but really concurring, laws, which we have not detected, is still more wonderful. The particular laws are as our points of view, as, to the traveller, a mountain outline varies with every step, and it has an infinite number of profiles, though absolutely but one form. Even when cleft or bored through it is not comprehended in its entirety." The Pond in Winter, pp. 234-35

Quote 28: "The day is an epitome of the year." Spring, pg. 241

Quote 29: "Why the jailer does not leave open his prison doors - why the judge does not dismiss his case - why the preacher does not dismiss his congregation! It is because they do not obey the hint which God gives them, nor accept the pardon which he freely offers all." Spring, pg. 251

Quote 30: "when the wild river valley and the woods were bathed in so pure and bright a light as would have waked the dead, if they had been slumbering in their graves, as some suppose. There needs no stronger proof of immortality. All things must live in such a light. O Death, where was thy sting? O Grave, where was thy victory then?" Spring, pg. 252

Quote 31: "we think that if rail-fences are pulled down, and stone-walls piled up on our farms, bounds are henceforth set to our lives and our fates decided. If you are chosen town clerk, forsooth, you cannot go to Tierra del Fuego this summer: but you may go to the land of infernal fire nevertheless. The universe is wider than our views of it." Conclusion, pg. 254

Quote 32: "I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the Highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now." Conclusion, pg. 257

Quote 33: "In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty, nor weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them." Conclusion, pg. 257

Quote 34: "As I stand over the insect crawling amid the pine needles on the forest floor, and endeavoring to conceal itself from my sight, and ask myself why it will cherish those humble thoughts, and hide its head from me who might, perhaps, be its benefactor, and impart to its race some cheering information, I am reminded of the greater Benefactor and Intelligence that stands over me the human insect." Conclusion, pg. 263





# Topic Tracking: Awakening for Reform

## Where I Lived

Awakening for Reform 1: By waking up fully in the morning, a person is able to undertake moral reform during the day. Once a person has thrown off sleep, including moral slumber, they can think clearly about moral imperatives.

## Solitude

Awakening for Reform 2: He says that a businessman who is dead to his experiences will not know to wake up in a place like Walden. At Walden the things of central importance are our immediate surroundings and the workman next to us, whose work, he says, define who we are.

## Higher Laws

Awakening for Reform 3: Thoreau realizes that the governor and his council once fished at Walden Pond, and now all they do is make rules and regulations regarding fishing at the pond.

## The Pond in Winter

Awakening for Reform 4: Thoreau begins this chapter awaking with a question put to him in the night, which was answered when he awoke again at dawn. The beauty of the light and his surroundings answers all his questions. After finding this answer, he turns to the morning work: finding water beneath a foot and a half of ice. The pond sleeps all winter like the animals, and when Thoreau cuts through the snow and ice to find the pond totally calm beneath, he finds heaven below as well as above.

## Spring

Awakening for Reform 5: One day, all of Walden seemed bathed in a light so pure nothing could remain sleeping and even the dead should have woken.

## Conclusion

Awakening for Reform 6: Thoreau talks about how it took him a week to wear a path from the door of his cabin to the pond, and even five or six years later the path remains. This is also true of the paths in men's minds. Once traveled, a path stays open for a long while.

Awaking for Reform 7: Common sense is dull, and is like men snoring and sleeping.



# Topic Tracking: Intellectual Space

## Solitude

Intellectual Space 1: Thoreau compares actual distances to intellectual distances, saying that no matter how far apart two bodies are, their minds can be in unison. On the other hand, no closeness of being can bring two arguing minds together.

Intellectual Space 2: He separates himself from his thinking mind, saying that the part of the self that is reflected inward can be made external to the self. The tasks and events of life are external to us. Most importantly, this external part of the self belongs to no one; it is entirely independent. In this environment, solitude is relative and not lonely. Society, on the other hand, is cheap and interferes with our sense of ourselves, because we do not have the space to think. We get in each other's way. We do not need to touch people to understand their value or importance to us. In the woods, God and Mother Earth are his company, which is plenty for him.

## Visitors

Intellectual Space 3: Thoreau begins this chapter by stating his need to be farther away from a visitor once they began a conversation together. When they had "big thoughts" during these conversations, they needed space for the thoughts. It was sometimes necessary to put the pond in between two people during a conversation. Besides which, real "intimate society" comes with silence and space. You can only be truly close to someone when you are silent together.

## The Ponds

Intellectual Space 4: While fishing, Thoreau began to ponder great thoughts when suddenly he caught a fish. He describes the feeling of returning to earth from your thoughts as "very queer."

## Higher Laws

Intellectual Space 5: After Thoreau gives his thoughts on higher laws and standards of being, he tells the story of John Farmer, who heard a flute one evening as he had sat down to think. The flute awakened a different part of himself than his work, about which he was struggling not to think. The flute brought him away from that sphere entirely, and he began to think about universal truths, which had the effect of "redeem[ing] his body."

## Former Inhabitants

Intellectual Space 6: Many of the people in this list were former or freed slaves, people at the end of their lives or careers who were hanging on to their former glory, or people on the fringe of society.

# Topic Tracking: My House Outdoors

## Economy

My House Outdoors 1: Thoreau gives an update on the progress of his house. The cellar is built, but the chimney and caulking will come later when the weather cools in the fall.

## Where I Lived

My House Outdoors 2: He mentions his house, which had many holes between boards and in the roof. This meant that it did not lose the freshness of the outdoors, which was very important to Thoreau.

## Sounds

My House Outdoors 3: Thoreau talks a little about how he misses the cock crowing, along with other domestic sounds: There is no yard, no gate, no path to the civilized world at Walden that can provide him with these very unique and different sounds. However, in the end, this gets him excited. He enjoys having nature outside, encroaching on the cabin, instead of a yard.

## House-Warming

My House Outdoors 4: The wasps left in November for winter quarters when Thoreau got winter quarters himself: His house became winter quarters with the first fires he lit inside. First he had to build his chimney. Unfortunately, he also had to repair the chinks in the roof and walls, which meant that being inside was not as pleasing, but also much warmer. He says this was the first time he actually inhabited his house. The house seemed larger because it was one room. His dream house is even larger, but still only one room, and without any superfluous "ginger-bread work" around the edges. It could house everything, and everyone, from royalty to the common cook and servant. Everything is visible, hung on pegs, and the best part about the openness is that you can hear the cooking no matter where you are. As a guest you have free run of the house, which is much more hospitable than the tradition of staying in a guest room, being kept apart from the rest of the house.

## Winter Animal

My House Outdoors 5: The pond was his yard, because the snow was blown off of it. He skated and slid on it.

## Spring

My House Outdoors 6: The robins came and proved that spring was here. That was the first spring night for Thoreau in his cabin.



# Topic Tracking: Water

## Where I Lived

Water 1: He says that water protects against the "insularity" of the earth, and reminds us that the earth is not entirely solid. In the morning he bathes in the pond. He says this wakes him up, which is the most important thing to do.

## Solitude

Water 2: In the next few paragraphs, Thoreau takes a systemic view on the bad weather that he faces. Rain is good somewhere, for something, even if it causes floods near him, and forces him to stop working for days at a time. He is so sympathetic partially because he finds such a good society in nature. Also, he finds the pelting rain, wind, thunder, and lightening very dramatic and beautiful.

## Visitors

Water 3: Nosy visitors disguised their curiosity by asking for a drink of water. Thoreau always directed them to drink from the pond.

## The Ponds

Water 4: All the Concord ponds, including Walden, look like they have two colors: a far away color and a close up color. These are usually, respectively, blue and green, but the ponds can also be slate on stormy days when they reflect the stormy sky. The ponds might be these colors, Thoreau surmises, because they reflect the color of the sand, the sky, the green of the surrounding hills, or some combination of both. What is most interesting to Thoreau is that a tiny spoonful of the pond water will be clear, when at the same time it appears colored when you look at the pond.

Water 5: When water is quiet it is as glass. The fish and bugs make concentric circles on its surface that are beautiful. Water is the intermediate form between earth and sky. Unlike the earth, it is affected by the wind and ripples with it. And, we can look down upon it and examine it. Thoreau imagines having that opportunity with the air one day, but for now he can observe the water. When the water reflects the clouds, Thoreau imagines that he's floating through the air - and the fish look like they're hovering in air.

Water 6: Thoreau mentions how Walden Pond appears as if it was shaped by some great hand, since its beauty seems so deliberate.

## Higher Laws

Water 7: Water is the only suitable drink for people. Even music is dangerous. Get drunk on the air instead of on wine.

## House-Warming

Water 8: With the first freeze came the first bit of ice on the pond. The first ice is perfect and clear. You can lie on this new ice before it will support your weight standing. There are millions of tiny bubbles in this new ice that look like a string of beads. Thoreau threw some stones that broke through and made big white bubbles. With an Indian summer (a late warm spell), the ice lost its beauty. The white bubbles from the stones burst against the new lower layer of ice.

### **Conclusion**

Water 9: Water has changed the landscape around us dramatically, and may do so again.

# Economy

*"I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up."* Economy, pg. 39

The first chapter of *Walden* is an introduction to Henry David Thoreau's philosophy that led him to live at Walden Pond for two years and two months. It gives the reader a background argument for this drastic step.

Thoreau begins the first chapter by talking about the problem of using "I" in the book, which is not an accepted convention in literature at this time. He decides that he is by necessity limited to his own experience in this book, since it was written chiefly while he lived alone on Walden Pond, and so resolves to use "I". Following this brief introduction, he takes up the issue of inheritances, and how they are more harm than worth. He feels that men work most of their life to get out of debt, and that the possessions (both land and other things) that they want so much actually make their life degrading. Along this line, an inheritance merely adds to a person's burden of stuff, and so makes their lives even more difficult and unpleasant.

*"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."* Economy, pg. 43

He talks about change, and the unwillingness of most people to accept the possibility of change in their lives, or to consider taking a risk towards change. This, he feels, is wrong.

The next set of issues Thoreau addresses in this chapter is food, shelter, clothing and fuel; because we have them, we need them, in their current luxurious forms. Thoreau is most critical of fire, and how we are obsessed with it. He introduces his concept of the body's vital heat, which people have replicated with their fires and over-luxurious houses. He talks about all the local businessmen who seek out trade in exotic places just so that in the end, they can have the money to be comfortably warm in New England. In other words, they spend all their lives making enough money so that they can transport the heat back to New England and die in warmth. He says that the luxuriously rich are in fact so warm that they get cooked in their houses. Above all, a poor philosopher's life is best, one that lives as he preaches, which solves the problems of life practically. They are able to learn how to maintain their vital heat in a better way. In this, and many other cases, the wealthy are the poorest because they do not know how they live - how to make their own fires burn, or cook their own food, and so are tied to something they have, but don't know how to use.

Thoreau leaves behind this broad discussion of slavery to one's money to speak about Walden Pond. He describes trying to catch the wind, and be present when the sun rises, because:

*"I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand at the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line."* Economy, pg. 49

The true purpose of Thoreau's stay in Walden:

*"My purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles; to be hindered from accomplishing which for want of a little common sense, a little enterprise and business talent, appeared not so sad as foolish."* Economy, pg. 51

Thoreau then returns to the main subject of this chapter, and tells the story of a local Indian who decided to make baskets as a living. After making a number of them, he went from house to house to sell them, only to realize that he had to create a demand for the baskets before anyone would be willing to buy them. Thoreau decides that, instead of learning how to create a demand, he would like to learn how to avoid selling baskets altogether. He doesn't like the strict business habits of the world, and is more interested in the business of the "celestial empire." In this empire, you can downscale your life, because all you need to keep track of your affairs is a cottage by the water, as opposed to a huge office. And so that is what Walden is for Thoreau.

Next, Thoreau takes up the ridiculousness of clothing, and how we must keep it in good order, even if it is of little import to the character of a person. In contrast to white people's extravagant ways, Indian wigwams are of high quality, comfortable, and very cheap to build and maintain:

*"But lo! men have become the tools of their tools. The man who independently plucked the fruits when he was hungry is become a farmer; and he who stood under a tree for shelter, a housekeeper. We now no longer camp as for a night, but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven. We have adopted Christianity merely as an improved method of agri-culture. We have built for this world a family mansion, and for the next a family tomb. The best works of art are the expression of man's struggle to free himself from this condition, but the effect of our art is merely to make this low state comfortable and that higher state to be forgotten."* Economy, pg. 64

In March of 1845, Thoreau borrows an axe to cut down timber for his house. It is a beautiful spring, thawing out everything people were unhappy about. The woodcutting took him a while, and he didn't think about much while he was doing it, but he enjoyed the process. He became well acquainted with the pine, which he was cutting through all his work. He also bought the boards for his house from a local Irish man, James Collins, who moved out so he could get the money for the boards.

Topic Tracking: My House Outdoors 1

Thoreau then proceeds to give an update on the progress of his house. The cellar is built, but the chimney and caulking will come later when the weather cools in the fall.



He raises the roof of the house with the help of some friends. The construction of his own house launches Thoreau into a commentary on the excesses of architecture, where fancy ornamental designs are useless, and only show off excessive wealth.

Flying in the face of this excess, Thoreau catalogues the expenses and profits of his first year in the woods: his building materials, food, sale of some crops, lime, and so on.

Next, Thoreau takes up a critique of school, especially against the cost of going away to study, and having to pay tuition, while the mere association with other excited scholars (not the classes) is the most valuable part of going to school. But, above all, learning by doing is more valuable than studying. Unfortunately, students at universities don't have any hands-on experiences.

Thoreau takes up a critique of the telegraph and railroad, and talks about how people are in a rush to connect places, but its not clear why, except for the satisfaction gained in saying it has been done. Also, it turns out that it takes as much time to earn the rail passage somewhere as it would just to walk there in the first place.

Thoreau returns to the issue of inheritance and estates. Things never go away, he says, and we only keep them to get rid of them in our estate, instead of cleaning out. We keep stuff only so we can show it off in our estate after we've died.

After this, Thoreau takes up the subject of charity. He doesn't practice it or think it's appropriate. He say it is ridiculous to employ someone out of pity when you could just do it yourself, and be a better person because of it. He insists that we must all become worthy of receiving charity, as opposed to poisoning other people by giving it to them. It's a disease to spread charity, if you are not true to yourself first, and happy with the life you are leading.

# Where I Lived, and What I Lived For

This chapter begins with a description of The Hollowell Place, a local farm, which Thoreau visited often. He talks about carrying off its scenery in his head because it is so beautiful.

Topic Tracking: My House Outdoors 2

The subject matter abruptly shifts to his house, which had many holes between boards and in the roof. This meant that it did not lose the freshness of the outdoors, which was very important to Thoreau. He then gives a close account of the area around Walden, which was in a large forested area between the villages of Concord and Lexington. He writes about the incredible stillness of the water, and then muses on the importance of water on earth.

Topic Tracking: Water 1

He says that water protects against the "insularity" of the earth, and reminds us that the earth is not entirely solid. In the morning he bathes in the pond. He says this wakes him up, which is the most important thing to do.

Topic Tracking: Awakening for Reform 1

By waking up fully in the morning, a person is able to undertake moral reform during the day. Once a person has thrown off sleep, including moral slumber, they can think clearly about moral imperatives.

*"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the 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. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion." What I Lived For, pg. 101*

Thoreau returns to railroads, which were an important issue for him. The Fitchburg Railroad line runs by the corner of Walden Pond many times daily. We need railroads only because we build them. The availability of things that the railroad provides causes a hunger for irrelevant news (which he says is repetitive and predictable), and mail.

He says that children, who play at life, know what it means better than the rest of us, who live it with such seriousness. In keeping with this lightness, he says that it appears



that the best thing to do with his head is burrow it in the sand. Then, he says that we need a "Realometer" to keep us from getting too far from what's important in life.

# Reading

Thoreau feels that his cabin is a better place to read than a university. He reads Homer's Iliad in bits and pieces through the first summer. And, he is ashamed of the light reading he does during this very busy summer growing beans and finishing the house. Along those lines, he underlines the importance of knowing Greek and Latin, so you can read the classics in their original languages. The classics are the only books worth reading. Thoreau also includes Eastern religious and philosophical works in this list, but does not talk about knowing those languages. Next, Thoreau makes a distinction between spoken and written language, and declares the superiority of the latter because it has the potential to last longer and therefore have more meaning. Providing an education to one's children, especially if you are uneducated, is like founding a family. The education allows the next generation to read the classics.

Thoreau then has a fantasy of filling a real library, like the library at Alexandria in the Roman Empire, with all the classics from all cultures - the Vedas, Zendavestas, Bibles, Homers, Dantes, Shakespeares of each culture. Unfortunately, Thoreau says, most people don't read well at all, and don't treat reading as the sacred, intellectual exercise it should be. They don't know how important it is to read anything more than the Bible, and so have no vision of alternate understandings of the world. In addition, there are many things written that, if people could understand them, could tell them important, universal truths. Unfortunately, these immortal words are lost on the inexperienced and unchallenged minds that do not know how to read in depth. To change this Thoreau believes that villages need to become centers of learning - universities for adults - which will allow reading to become sacred and valuable once again. He goes on to call for the village to become a patron of the arts.

*"If we live in the nineteenth century, why should we not enjoy the advantages which the nineteenth century offers? Why should our life be in any respect Provincial?"* Reading, pg. 114

# Sounds

After taking a chapter to champion the importance of books, Thoreau now says that they are merely metaphor, and that the truth lies in things around us that are directly observable. He recalls mornings sitting on his stoop contemplating his surroundings, unaware of the passage of time until a passing wagon reminded him that it was noon already. He grew during those periods. He spent all summer hoeing beans, which was better than reading, because it allowed for a close contact with Nature that was similar to his mornings of contemplation. His amusement during this time was cleaning house, because he was able to appreciate the small irony of taking everything out of doors in order to sweep and mop the floor. The pleasure and humor in seeing all his furniture mingled so carelessly with nature - trees, shrubs, and animals - was a constant source of joy. The berries draping over his table were a particularly wonderful sight.

The next paragraph begins the first narrative in the book in the present. He describes hawks and pigeons, and hears the railroad, which reminds him of a boy he heard about who was sent to the country to work on a farm. The boy can't stand the simplicity of the people, and misses the sound of the train whistle. The boy escapes back to the city. Thoreau feels sorry for the boy, and mourns the fact that there is nowhere in Massachusetts anymore where you can't hear a train whistle. Thoreau recognizes that he is related to society by the Fitchburg Railroad, which runs so close to his cabin. Many of the employees of railroad believe he works with them because he's around so often. In reality, he is actually watching the huge amounts of raw materials that are carted off to the city, only to be brought back on a subsequent train for sale.

*"To do things 'railroad fashion' is now the by-word; and it is worth the while to be warned so often and so sincerely by any power to get off its track. There is no stopping to read the riot act, no firing over the heads of the mob, in this case. We have constructed a fate, an Atropos, that never turns aside. (Let that be the name of your engine.) Men are advertised that at a certain hour and minute these bolts will be shot toward particular points of the compass; yet it interferes with no man's business, and the children go to school on the other track. We live the steadier for it. We are all educated thus to be sons of Tell. The air is full of invisible bolts. Every path but your own is the path of fate. Keep on your own track, then."* Sounds, pg. 120

The goods on the train come from far-away places, as well as from local areas, and remind Thoreau of far-off lands. They are gathered from rich and poor alike to be made into some new product for sale. It is an equalizer to have everyone's second-hand articles stuffed all together. These very characteristic goods remind Thoreau of the static nature of a man's disposition. He is especially taken with the characteristics of Spanish ox tails, which, even after years of tannin and stretching, retain their curl. But Thoreau maintains that he really has no use for the railroad, which whistles and makes him get off the track when he is wonderfully absorbed by what the track has to offer. He quotes a Psalm about the hills and mountains skipping like lambs and rams, like the train as it passes by. It's like, but not as reassuring as, the image of a divine-inspired movement of the earth. And, in addition, the trains are a source of pollution.

Next, Thoreau begins a discussion of the surrounding towns' bells, which he can hear on Sundays from his cabin. Instead of a clear ringing, though, he hears a dispersed sound, which he calls "the universal lyre" because it blends in with the other sounds, and begins to vibrate with them. The echo of the bells is a sound of its own, too, independent of the actual ringing, because it is part of the surroundings which cause it to echo.

Thoreau hears other regular sounds. The whippoorwills begin to sing each evening at 7:30. Screech owls make their eerie scream at night - something Thoreau describes with great power and respect. There was also a hooting owl, who made a sound that was so melancholy, it almost sounded like human sobs, but was melodious from a distance. Thoreau is glad that the owls make these sounds - owls can make maniacal sounds in place of men. Then, there are the bullfrogs, which act like a group of gluttonous party-goers, with their overstuffed call and response each night.

#### Topic Tracking: My House Outdoors 3

Thoreau talks a little about how he misses the cock crowing, along with other domestic sounds. There is no yard, no gate, no path to the civilized world at Walden that can provide him with these very unique and different sounds. However, in the end, this gets him excited. He enjoys having nature outside, encroaching on the cabin, instead of a yard.

# Solitude

In the evenings, Thoreau takes walks through the woods. He absorbs the surroundings through every part of his body, through osmosis almost. When he returns to his cabin after these lovely walks, he finds tokens of peoples' visits. He says that people who do not come to the woods very often always absentmindedly pick something up as they walk. In addition to physical signs of visitors, Thoreau is able to detect the scent of visitors and nearby travelers - often by the lingering smoke from a pipe. However, what is most exciting to him is his own horizon - stars, moon, and sun, which he has in solitude as if he were in the middle of Africa. That is because, at night, there is a fear of the dark that drives visitors away.

Topic Tracking: Water 2

In the next few paragraphs, Thoreau takes a systemic view on the bad weather he faces. Rain is good somewhere, for something, even if it causes floods near him, and forces him to stop working for days at a time. He is so sympathetic partially because he finds such a good society in nature. Also, he finds the dramatic pelting rain, wind, thunder, and lightening very dramatic and beautiful.

When asked if he is lonely in this apparently hostile environment, he responds:

*"This whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in space. How far apart, think you, dwell the two most distant inhabitants of yonder star, the breadth of whose disk cannot be appreciated by our instruments? Why should I feel lonely? Is not our planet in the Milky Way? This which you put seems to me not to be the most important question. What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another."* Solitude, pg. 130

He says that a wise man will know to dig their cellar in a place such as Walden, and not busy themselves with selling things only to accumulate more material riches.

Topic Tracking: Intellectual Space 1

Topic Tracking: Awakening for Reform 2

He says that a businessman who is dead to his experiences will not know to wake up in a place like Walden where the things of central importance are our immediate surroundings and the workman next to us, whose work, he says, we are.

Topic Tracking: Intellectual Space 2

He separates himself from his thinking mind, saying that the part of the self that reflects inward can be made external to the self. The tasks and events of life are external to us. Most importantly, this external part of the self belongs to no one - it is entirely independent. In this environment, solitude is relative and not lonely. Society, on the

other hand, is cheap and interferes with our sense of ourselves, because we do not have the space to think. We get in each other's way. We do not need to touch people to understand their value/importance to us. In the woods, God and Mother Earth are his company, which is plenty for him.

In this environment, there are certain things more precious than anything else. One is the morning air, which won't keep even until noon. Keep it if you can, he says, but it will get stale pretty fast.

# Visitors

*"I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society. When the visitors came in larger and unexpected numbers there was but the third chair for them all, but they generally economized the room by standing up. It is surprising how many great men and women a small house will contain. I have had twenty-five or thirty souls, with their bodies, at once under my roof, and yet we often parted without being aware that we had come very near to one another." Visitors, pg. 135*

Topic Tracking: Intellectual Space 3

Thoreau begins this chapter by stating his need to be farther away from a visitor once they began a conversation together. When they had "big thoughts" during these conversations, they needed space for the thoughts. It was sometimes necessary to put the pond in between two people during a conversation. Besides which, real "intimate society" comes with silence and space. You can only be truly close to someone when you are silent together. In fact, Thoreau even has a withdrawing room - instead of a drawing room - in the pine forest behind his house that has infinitely more space.

On the subject of visitors and hospitality, Thoreau never offers dinner when he has a lot of visitors. He doesn't even mention it, because to talk about it would only have drawn attention to a lack of food in the house for which there was no solution. He tells the story of the early Massachusetts governor Edward Winslow meeting the Massassoit Indians for territory discussions during the winter. The tribe was only able offer one fish for the whole tribe. No one mentioned the lack of food, they simply ate what they could. Winslow was furious, but didn't realize that no one mentioned the lack of food to call attention to it - otherwise it would have become a much larger issue. In this way they did not distract from the business at hand.

Thoreau had many visitors in the woods - more than he ever had while living in town, but they came only for more serious and earnest business. It was a natural selection of visitors at Walden.

One frequent visitor was the Canadian woodchopper, Aleck Therien. Thoreau was impressed by his simplicity, and the fact that he worked only for his board, because he didn't feel the need for any more. In addition, Aleck was very skillful, but not a slave to his work. He was "genuine and unsophisticated," almost a child in his manners. He was simple in his thought, trusting, and not in the least bit introspective, even when Thoreau asked him introspective questions. Thoreau tried many times to engage him in intellectual thought, but Aleck had never considered the things Thoreau asked about, and had no interest in beginning to do so. He did not speculate, and did not have a spiritual life. However, his honesty, character, and genuine love for his work and surroundings impressed Thoreau a great deal.

*"He suggested that there might be men of genius in the lowest grades of life, however permanently humble and illiterate, who take their own view always, or do not pretend to*

*see at all; who are as bottomless even as Walden Pond was thought to be, though they may be dark and muddy."* Visitors, pp. 141-42

At the beginning of April many more visitors began to show up, just as things began to move and migrate. Among these visitors were people from the poorhouse, and the pauper, who was "deficient in intellect," but who Thoreau thought to be in better shape than many people who were much smarter, because he knew and told the truth. There was also a runaway slave, whom he helped to hide and pass on along the underground railroad.

However, Thoreau noticed that many people (mostly men) were unwilling and unable to enjoy their time at the pond because they had to accomplish something. They couldn't simply "improve their time" by observing their surroundings, like many of the children and women who came simply to be by the pond. He felt that there were many people also who were afraid to be away from the safety of the town and their doctor, among other comforts. Thoreau feels that that's ridiculous, you have to take risks and live, or there's no point.

There were also some curious people who came and snooped around in his house because they couldn't understand him or what he was doing. One woman even checked to see how clean his sheets were!

### Topic Tracking: Water 3

Mostly, they disguised their curiosity by asking for a drink of water. Thoreau always directed them to drink from the pond.

All in all, he decided he liked the old men and children who came out for a walk on Sundays the best, and would always call hello to them.



# The Bean-Field

In the midst of all his philosophizing, he realized that all his bean rows would stretch seven miles when placed end-to-end. What was most amazing was the fact that he was getting beans from soil that had never before yielded beans. Still, it was sad that he had to do so much weeding of other, mostly native, plants to yield the beans. Thoreau realized that the land had been cleared about 15 years previous to him moving there, and there were still a lot of stumps stuck in the ground. He didn't fertilize the ground, but hoed it a lot instead, which he felt made up for the lack of nutrients. However, he found some arrowheads in his digging, which made him think that Indians had planted beans here long ago, and that they knew the soil was good for growing beans. Growing his beans was Thoreau's "daily work."

*"When my hoe tinkled against the stones, that music echoed to the woods and the sky, and was an accompaniment to my labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop. It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans; and I remembered with as much pity as pride, if I remembered at all, my acquaintances who had gone to the city to attend the oratorios."* The Bean-Field, pg. 147

Sometimes, in the afternoons, a night-hawk would fly overhead. Thoreau felt the bird was answering to the sea, and that the air was to it like water is to a fish. He was taken by its beauty and skill, and its back and forth trips through the air- like his thoughts.

Twice a year, Thoreau was disturbed in his bean-field by the blast of the guns from Concord. They were shot in honor of the Battle of Concord that started the Revolutionary war, and Independence Day. He senses, on those days, that a disease is about to break out in the area. He expresses sarcastic hope about feeling secure in Massachusetts when the guns go off. He is even more scathing in regards to the military bands that are supposed to inspire chivalry, which Thoreau merely likens to violence. However, he can find no difference in the sky on those days, which is a relief. Nature is not bothered by the guns.

There are so many steps to growing beans, and Thoreau had the opportunity to become intimately acquainted with each one, from hoeing the rows to harvesting and eating them. By the end of the summer, he knew the beans because of his work on every step of growing them. It turned out that he also knew the weeds at that point, too. Although he took a few of his beans to eat, they weren't a part of his diet. Instead, he traded them for rice; 12 bushels of beans in all.

Thoreau then imparts advice on how to raise beans best in New England. He also discovers, during his second summer, that beans did not re-seed themselves. They die or get eaten over the winter. Now that Thoreau is done talking about cultivating beans, he goes on to children. Should we not take care in raising the next generation, he asks? We should cultivate the same qualities in children - strength, health, and so on.



Husbandry (the science of farming and agriculture) is Thoreau's next subject. It used to be considered (in Greek and Roman times) a sacred profession. It was practiced not only to sell food for profit, but as an exercise in growing and working with the earth. Along these lines, Thoreau sees that he can rejoice that his beans are food for the woodchucks as much as for people, and that the growth of the weeds is as important as that of the beans.

# The Village

Thoreau tells us that he went every day or two to catch up on gossip. He also went to watch the people, which he compared to watching the squirrels in the forest go about their daily activities.

*"In one direction from my house there was a colony of muskrats in the river meadows; under the grove of elms and button-woods in the other horizon was a village of busy men, as curious to me as if they had been prairie dogs, each sitting at the mouth of its burrow, or running over to a neighbor's to gossip." The Village, pg. 153*

He then analyzes the composition of the village by pointing out the "vitals" of the village: the grocery, bar-room, post office and bank. In addition, he notices the heavy machinery that is placed in the middle of the town square: a bell, big gun and fire-engine.

Thoreau doesn't like the village, and feels as if it is designed to make people run the gauntlet as they walk through town. The houses and shops are set up to make every person as visible as possible as they pass by. In addition, there are signs, fancy things, houses with people to call upon that all entice the passerby to stop and waste money or time. Thoreau says he escaped from town out the back way of a house after paying a visit. It was pleasant, and a relief, to leave by way of the forest.

Then, as he walks home, he gets lost in a reverie and loses his way, which is actually pleasant, especially in a storm, when nothing looks the same. He notices more this way and is better able to understand the vastness and wonder of Nature. Very often, however, he realizes when he arrives that he did not remember the walk because he was in such deep reverie.

Thoreau was put in jail one day (and released the next) when he went to town for failure to pay taxes,

*"I did not pay a tax to, or recognize the authority of, the state which buys and sells men, women, and children, like cattle at the door of its senate-house. I had gone down to the woods for other purposes. But, wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society. It is true, I might have resisted forcibly with more or less effect, might have run 'amok' against society; but I preferred that society should run 'amok' against me, it being the desperate party." The Village, pg. 156*

# The Ponds

Huckleberries only taste right if you've picked them yourself. They spoil during sale and transport, so you'll never really know what they taste like till you've gone out to pick them.

Thoreau often joined fishermen by the pond at the end of the day. They had trouble getting bites from the fish. However, there was one older man who was an excellent fisherman, and they often spent time fishing in a boat together. If he was alone, Thoreau made his own noise for company by hitting the side of his boat with a paddle.

There were also times when he played his flute at night while sitting in his boat. These moments make Thoreau remember that he used to come to the pond as a visitor. He would often spend time on the pond at night like this after he had returned from a visit late at night, and needed to fish for the next day's meal. One thing in particular that captivated him at night were the fish reflecting in the moonlight.

Topic Tracking: Intellectual Space 4

*"It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonical themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook."* The Ponds, pg. 159

Walden has no visible inlet or outlet, and is surrounded by steep hills and wooded areas.

Topic Tracking: Water 4

All the Concord ponds, including Walden, look like they have two colors: a far away color and a close up color. These are usually, respectively, blue and green. But the ponds can also be slate on stormy days when they reflect the stormy sky. The ponds might be these colors, Thoreau surmises, because they reflect the color of the sand, the sky, the green of the surrounding hills, or some combination of both. What is most interesting to Thoreau is that a tiny spoonful of the pond water will be clear, when at the same time it appears colored when you look at the pond.

The water in Walden Pond is clear enough to see the bottom at 25-35 feet. The shore is stony, and very steep. The pond is sandy otherwise, and deep, but not bottomless. White Pond is similar - pure and well-like. Thoreau is so taken with Walden that he is convinced it was in existence at the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. It has been since then a "distiller of celestial dews." Also, it may appear to be pristine here, but the pond is grand enough that it could be the place where nations could have quenched their thirst thousands of years ago. To prove this idea, Thoreau mentions the

faint path visible only in winter from the middle of the pond. -The path circles the pond, alternately coming up close and leaving the edge of the pond.

Thoreau discovered that the level of the pond fluctuates by about five feet over a period of 25 years. Although it takes many years to go up or down, this is a very dramatic shift. Flint's Pond and White Pond are like that as well, and follow the same fluctuations. With the fluctuations, the high water kills encroaching plant life and keeps the shore clear on other years.

Next, Thoreau refers to the stories he has heard of how Walden came to be, because it seems to him to be so irregular and singular due to its depth and clarity. Thoreau is certain that there was once no pond here. First, he tells the story of an Indian Pow Wow that took place atop a mountain that once stood on this spot. They all sunk into the ground because they used an excessive amount of profanity, and only one woman survived. The resulting pond was named after her. Thoreau also mentions the English town Saffron Walden, and the term "walled-in" (because of the stones lining the edges of the shore) as possible origins of the name.

Walden is his ready-dug well. He notices that the temperature fluctuates a lot during the spring and summer. It gets colder than other nearby water sources ever do, and the temperature rises more steadily and higher than in other ponds. Thoreau also chronicles some of the large fish caught at Walden, and talks about the large birds and animals that come to the pond: a loon and a turtle.

In addition, Thoreau notices circular heaps of stones about six feet in diameter that sit on the pond bottom. He wonders if they were formed on the ice by Indians and fell to the bottom in the spring, but decides that they are too regular and new for that. They can't be leech holes, as there are none in Walden.

The irregular shoreline of the pond - bays, inlets, and the woods coming up to the edge - indicates that there is no hand of man here.

#### Topic Tracking: Water 5

When water is quiet it is as glass. The fish and bugs make concentric circles on its surface that are beautiful. Water is the intermediate form between earth and sky. Unlike the earth, it is affected by the wind and ripples with it. And, we can look down upon it and examine it. Thoreau imagines having that opportunity with the air one day, but for now he can observe the water. When the water reflects the clouds, Thoreau imagines that he's floating through the air - and the fish look like they're hovering in air.

There is an old man who visits Thoreau who found a log canoe years ago, when the pond was full of waterfowl, which it no longer is. Thoreau is pleased to know about the canoe, and thinks it is part of a lineage of canoes, starting with an Indian canoe, and that the many logs he can see on the bottom of the pond could be parts of old canoes.

Speaking from the perspective of a few years since he left his cabin at Walden, Thoreau mentions that since he lived at the pond, the woods have been largely cut. Thoreau



thinks this will quiet the muse he enjoyed at Walden forever. However, the water remains the same forever. There are no permanent wrinkles the water can take on.

Topic Tracking: Water 6

*"it is the same liquid joy and happiness to itself and its Maker, ay, and it may be to me. It is the work of a brave man surely, in whom there was no guile! He rounded this water with his hand, deepened and clarified it in his thought, and in his will bequeathed it to Concord." The Ponds, pp. 170-171*

Thoreau realizes that Walden is linked indirectly to Flint's Pond, which is higher up. He thinks there may have been a river between the two, in another geological period. Flint's Pond is much larger, however. It is Concord's "greatest lake and inland sea." It has more fish and is shallower, but not as pure as Walden. In addition, there is the old, molded frame of a boat on the shore (not a canoe).

*"Flint's Pond! Such is the poverty of our nomenclature. What right had the unclean and stupid farmer, whose farm abutted on this sky water, whose shores he has ruthlessly laid bare, to give his name to it? Some skinflint, who loved better the reflecting surface of a dollar, or bright cent, in which he could see his own brazen face; who regarded even the wild ducks which settled in it as trespassers; his fingers grown into crooked and horny talons from the long habit of grasping harpy-like - so it is not named for me. I go not there to see him nor to hear of him; who never saw it, who never bathed in it, who never loved it, who never protected it, who never spoke a good word for it, nor thanked God that he had made it. Rather let it be named from the fishes that swim in it, the wild fowl or quadrupeds which frequent it, the wild flowers which grow by its shores, or some wild man or child the thread of whose history is interwoven with its own; not from him who could show no title to it but the deed which a like-minded neighbor or legislature gave him...." The Ponds, pg. 172*

Thoreau lists Goose Pond, which is an inlet in the Concord River, and White Pond. These ponds total his lake country (like that area in England defined by English Romantic Poets). All these ponds are within two miles of Thoreau.

Because Thoreau, the railroad, and woodcutters have encroached on Walden, White Pond is the gem of all these. It remains almost totally pristine. There is an upside-down tree in the middle of the lake, which had been there for a good 100 years at least. Walden and White Ponds are what Thoreau calls "Lakes of Light." They are like gems on the surface of the earth.

# Baker Farm

Thoreau says that he pays visits to particular trees in place of going to visit a great scholar.

*"Once it chanced that I stood in the very abutment of a rainbow's arch, which filled the lower stratum of the atmosphere, tinging the grass and leaves around, and dazzling me as if I looked through colored glass crystal. It was a lake of rainbow light, in which, for a short while, I lived like a dolphin. If it had lasted longer it might have tinged my employments and life. As I walked on the railroad causeway, I used to wonder at the halo of light around my shadow, and would fain fancy myself one of the elect. One who visited me declared that the shadows of some Irishmen before him had no halo about them, that it was only natives that were so distinguished. Benvenuto Cellini tells us in his memoirs, that, after a certain terrible dream or vision which he had during his confinement in the castle of St. Angelo, a resplendent light appeared over the shadow of his head at morning and evening, whether he was in Italy or France, and it was particularly conspicuous when the grass was moist with dew. This was probably the same phenomenon to which I have referred, which is especially observed in morning, but also at other times, and even by moonlight. Though a constant one, it is not commonly noticed, and, in the case of an excitable imagination like Cellini's, it would be basis enough for superstition. Beside, he tells us that he showed it to very few. But are they not indeed distinguished who are conscious that they are regarded at all?" Baker Farm, pp. 176-77*

Thoreau walks through Baker farm on the way to Fair Haven to fish. He had thought of living here before settling on Walden and getting squatter's rights there. At Baker farm, he goes fishing and gets driven from the water by a huge clap of thunder and lightening that almost immobilize him.

While waiting in the rain, he meets John Field, a poor Irish immigrant who lives in the rundown house at Baker Farm that Thoreau would have used. John Field bogs (turns up topsoil on a farm in exchange for some acreage to plant) with his son, and works very hard for very little in return. Thoreau tries to convince him that if he lived more simply, he would not need the little money he now makes, and could stop working. He would only have to search for his food, which is in abundance in the area. But he'd have to give up tea and coffee, butter, milk, and beef. Thoreau says that the only true America is a place where you can choose to live without those things, and still be happy. Thoreau continues in this philosophical vein with the family, but they aren't able to hear it. The family can't live without the things Thoreau lists, and John Field doesn't seem to be able to fish properly and so support the family. They are heading for another goal entirely, and can't stop now. It seems to Thoreau that the course towards possession and a dependence on the products of society is a cycle that traps people inside.

*"As I was leaving the Irishman's roof after the rain, bending my steps again to the pond, my haste to catch pickerel, wading in retired meadows, in sloughs and bog-holes, in forlorn and savage places, appeared for an instant trivial to me who had been sent to*





*school and college; but as I ran down the hill toward the reddening west, with the rainbow over my shoulder, and some faint tinkling sounds borne to my ear through the cleansed air, from I know not what quarter, my Good Genius seemed to say - Go fish and hunt far and wide day by day - farther and wider - and rest thee by many brooks and hearth-sides without misgiving. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Rise free from care before the dawn, and seek adventures. Let the noon find thee by other lakes, and the night overtake thee everywhere at home. There are no larger fields than these, no worthier games than may here be played. Grow wild according to thy nature, like these sedges and brakes, which will never become English bay. Let the thunder rumble; what if it threaten ruin to farmers' crops? that is not its errand to thee. Take shelter under the cloud, while they flee to carts and sheds. Let not to get a living be thy trade, but thy sport. Enjoy the land, but own it not. Through want of enterprise and faith men are where they are, buying and selling their lives like serfs." Baker Farm, pg. 180*



# Higher Laws

Sometimes, when he is walking through the weeds, Thoreau describes feeling like a hound who is chasing after a hunk of meat in the woods. He recognizes two impulses in people: savage and spiritual, and decides that both are of equal value and worthy of equal reverence. This is partially because he learned about the wilderness initially through hunting. He states that if there is no other way for boys to learn about Nature when they are young, let that be it. Thoreau pitied the birds he used to shoot, but not the worms and fish. A boy who has never fired a gun has not been well educated. Then, if he has matured well, he will begin to leave the gun behind.

Topic Tracking: Awakening for Reform 3

*"The governor and his council faintly remember the pond, for they went a-fishing here when they were boys; but now they are too old and dignified to go a-fishing, and so they know it no more forever. Yet even they expect to go to heaven at last. If the legislature regards it, it is chiefly to regulate the number of hooks to be used there; but they know nothing of the hook of hooks with which to angle for the pond itself, impaling the legislature for bait. Thus, even in civilized communities, the embryo man passes through the hunter stage of development."* Higher Laws, pg. 184

Even though he says above that he did not feel for the fish he used to catch, his self-respect is lowered when he fishes now. It is partly because he recognizes the uncleanness of having meat in one's diet: this is where housework comes from. People are always trying to rid their body and house of the unsavory smells of meat. Eating meat is disagreeable to Thoreau's imagination, and his distaste of it is instinctual. It is important, though hard, to eat without offending the imagination, so both can be fed when you sit down at the table. Part of the continuing improvement of the human race is to stop eating meat, even if it means we are slightly less hardy physically.

Topic Tracking: Water 7

Water is the only suitable drink for people. Even music is dangerous. Get drunk on the air instead of on wine.

It is important to know the true taste of your food, to know whether or not it is for the animal need (which is more important), or the gluttonous desire for more that we often fall prey to.

Sounds, even bad ones, from far off, when they are carried on the wind, sound sweet, and can be satirical because they are oddly sweet in comparison to our ordinary-ness.

Chastity, which is a higher law, is something that no one can define, so much so that you don't know even if you possess it. Along the lines of chastity, overcoming one's nature is the only way to be pure. You have to work honestly and fully. A Christian is no

better than a heathen if your actions contain no more pure intention. By saying this, Thoreau feels that he betrays his impurity.

*"We are so degraded that we cannot speak simply of the necessary functions of human nature."* Higher Laws, pg. 189

These inner qualities make everyone a sculptor of his or her own body. One's inner qualities are made manifest in a person's outer appearance and nature.

Topic Tracking: Intellectual Space 5

After Thoreau gives his thoughts on these higher laws and standards of being, he tells the story of John Farmer, who heard a flute one evening as he had sat down to think. The flute awakened a different part of himself than his work, about which he was struggling not to think. The flute brought him away from that sphere entirely, and he began to think about universal truths, which had the effect of "redeem[ing] his body."

# Brute Neighbors

William Ellery Channing often fishes with Thoreau. He begins this chapter by creating an imaginary dialogue between the Hermit (himself) and a Poet (Ellery Channing) based on their visits. He begins as the Hermit is interrupted by the Poet while thinking about how the world is doing, knowing that he hasn't heard any civilized noise for some time. He can't imagine living in a place where you can't think because the dog is barking too loudly.

The Poet enters with a rustling of leaves, talking about the clouds. He invites the Hermit to go fishing, which the Hermit can't resist, because his food supply is low. First though, the Hermit asks to be left alone to finish thinking while the Poet digs for bait. The Hermit goes back to thinking, trying to find his frame of mind, and thinks of sentences from Confucius, but never gets to recite them. The Poet returns, and off they go to Concord to fish.

Thoreau follows with some close observations of animals:

A squirrel that nibbles from his hand; a phoebe and a robin.

A partridge, who trains her young to be absolutely still until the mother gives a sign, and who blend in well with the leaves on the forest floor. They have ageless eyes that particularly stir Thoreau.

An otter, and a raccoon who live near his cabin.

The woodcock, who comes to the spring where Thoreau gets water and sits reading some days. She would circle him if he came near her chicks.

He recounts an ant battle - red ants vs. black, which he saw taking place on his woodpile. He watched for a while, then brought two red ants and one black one who were fighting together inside to the windowsill. They all were very hurt, but the red ones, which were much smaller, both got killed after half an hour inside. The black one walked away, but Thoreau isn't sure if he survived. He likened what he saw to the Battle of Bunker Hill in Boston (during the Revolutionary War), and imagined that the ants had their own trumpets and battle cries, just like men do.

Historically, observed ant battles have been recorded by famous human leaders and warriors, so Thoreau records this one for posterity. It took place during the Polk presidency, five years before Webster's Fugitive-Slave bill.

He speaks of wild cats. He is especially fascinated by the "winged" cat, owned by a nearby farmer who wasn't in when he came to call. Instead, Thoreau took some of its shed wings of matted fur, and kept them. He would have liked to have a winged cat as well as horse (poets are supposed to ride on Pegasus, a winged horse, in Greek Mythology).



He describes the loon and the hunters. The stormy October weather thwarts their hunting attempts, as if in concert with the loon. He dives deep and long, and can keep going like that for hours - never to be discovered or caught. He never tires of this constant back and forth. However, Thoreau is most impressed by the loon's howls, which are eerie, almost human-sounding. Like the owl, the loon can make that human sound.

He observes a group of ducks who would settle for a short while, but then be off. They seemed to come to Walden for the pleasure of it, more than for any practical reason.



# House-Warming

Thoreau went graping in October to harvest delicious concord grapes. While out, he found a lot of cranberries, which looked like red gems sitting on the ground, destined to be ruined by being made into jam and then sold.

*"Digging one day for fish-worms I discovered the ground-nut (Apios tuberosa) on its string, the potato of the aborigines....Cultivation has well nigh exterminated it....This tuber seemed like a faint promise of Nature to rear her own children and feed them simply here at some future period. In these days of fatted cattle and waving grain-fields, this humble root, which was once the totem of an Indian tribe, is quite forgotten, or known only by its flowering vine; but let wild Nature reign here once more, and the tender and luxurious English grains will probably disappear before a myriad of foes...but the now almost exterminated ground-nut will perhaps revive and flourish in spite of frosts and wildness, prove itself indigenous, and resume its ancient importance and dignity as the diet of the hunter tribe."* House-Warming, pp. 200-201

The maples began to turn in September, each gradually showing its character with the colors of fall. Thoreau encountered a new picture on the gallery wall each morning during the fall. He also encountered the wasps who came in October and infested his house. They got swept out in the morning when they were still cold.

Topic Tracking: My House Outdoors 4

The wasps left in November for winter quarters, when Thoreau got winter quarters himself. His house became winter quarters with the first fires he lit inside. First, he had to build his chimney: cleaning second-hand bricks, with his friend the poet visiting. Unfortunately, he also had to repair the chinks in the roof and walls, which meant that being inside was not as pleasing, but also much warmer. This was the first time he actually inhabited his house. The house seemed larger because it was one room. His dream house is even larger, but still only one room, and without any superfluous "ginger-bread work" around the edges. It could house everything, and everyone, from royalty to the common cook and servant. Everything is visible, hung on pegs, and the best part about the openness is you can hear the cooking no matter where you are. As a guest you have free run of the house, which is much more hospitable than the tradition of staying in a guest room, being kept apart from the rest of the house.

Thoreau began plastering the house when it began to freeze, and gathered and burnt his own limestone.

Topic Tracking: Water 8

With the first freeze came the first bit of ice on the pond. The first ice is perfect and clear. You can lie on this new ice before it will support your weight standing. There are millions of tiny bubbles in this new ice that look like a string of beads. Thoreau threw some stones that broke through and made big white bubbles. With an Indian summer (a



late warm spell), the ice lost its beauty. The white bubbles from the stones burst against the new lower layer of ice.

After this description, Thoreau chronicles the freezing of Walden Pond for the first time in five years.

As the pond freezes and winter comes, Thoreau realizes that food is much more appreciated when you have to hunt for it in the winter weather. With this weather also comes a new respect for wood, which seems every year to go up in price, because the demand never ceases.

He would consecrate wood groves to a God because they are so beautiful and awe-ful. Thoreau recognizes the value of his own woodpile - pine, old stumps, dry leaves for kindling, and green hickory. The smoke from his fire let everyone know that he was around (like the smoke from the village). He did not leave his house alone when he left - the fire was still there. But by leaving his fire going, he did narrowly escape catching the house on fire one day. The next year he used a cooking stove instead of an open fire for safety and efficiency, but missed the friendly, open fire that seemed to have animals and spirits in it.

## Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors

In the winter he rarely saw anyone, and had to think back to former inhabitants of the area around Walden to keep himself company:

Cato and Zilpha Ingraham, Brister and Fenda Freeman, the Stratten family homestead, Breed's hut, Wyman the potter, Col. Hugh Quoil.

Topic Tracking: Intellectual Space 6

Many of the people in this list were former or freed slaves, people at the end of their lives or careers who were hanging on to their former glory, or people on the fringe of society. All these people once lived here, but no village ever formed like the village of Concord. Thoreau wonders why:

*"I am not aware that any man has ever built on the spot which I occupy. Deliver me from a city built on the site of a more ancient city, whose materials are ruins, whose gardens cemeteries. The soil is blanched and accursed there, and before that becomes necessary the earth itself will be destroyed. With such reminiscences I repeople the woods and lulled myself asleep."* Winter Visitors, pg. 218

The snow closed Walden in, but made it possible to make very exact paths through the woods. Thoreau took the exact same steps for a week on one of his paths before the weather changed and wiped out his footprints. Despite the snow, he kept his appointments with his trees, some a ten-mile hike through the woods.

On one walk he encountered a barred owl. Thoreau made a lot of noise to get him to wake up but the owl barely did, and then finally just flew away to another tree to go back to sleep undisturbed. Even in the dead of winter, Thoreau could inevitably find some living plant life, or a hardy bird.

He also spent time with the "long-headed farmer," who was a deeply moral and religious man. There was also the poet who is mentioned before, who came at all hours of the night, simply because he was in need of visiting. He brought noise and laughter and busy-ness to Walden, as well as deep philosophical discussions.

A. Bronson Alcott also began to come often during the winter to talk and sit. Thoreau thought he was an exceptional man, a philosopher of great faith, and an optimist. He was also free, and not tied to any institution of society. They had many amazing and heady and weighty conversations.

Emerson also came, as they had spent many "solid seasons" together in the village previous to Thoreau moving to Walden.

*"There too, as every where, I sometimes expected the Visitor who never comes. The Vishnu Purana says, 'The house-holder is to remain at eventide in his courtyard as long as it takes to milk a cow, or longer if he pleases, to await the arrival of a guest.' I often*

*performed this duty of hospitality, waited long enough to milk a whole herd of cows, but did not see the man approaching from the town." Winter Visitors, pg. 222*



# Winter Animals

Thoreau discovered a new view from the center of the pond when was frozen over. From there, he saw more extreme things than he ever had before.

Topic Tracking: My House Outdoors 5

Walden Pond was his yard, without snow. He skated and slid on it.

The hooting owl returned to Walden in the winter - familiar and regular. There was also a goose who was loud and alarming, as if chasing people out of the area. Yet, despite this noise, Walden was welcoming like no other place. Even ice whooped in response to the daily fluctuation of temperature and sun. The foxes came in groups, sometimes to Thoreau's door, then retreated. They seemed as if they had some sort of civilization themselves. The red squirrel woke Thoreau at dawn, running up and down the side of the house. It would spend its day eating sweet corn, running back and forth constantly. Then the jays came to eat the corn. They were dumb and always choking themselves on the kernels. Chickadees came too, but they did not choke. They pecked at each kernel till they could swallow a piece. Then there were the mice, which ate Thoreau's crumbs and lived inside the house. One day a sparrow landed on his shoulder, which Thoreau considered a great honor. The squirrels and he got to be very familiar with each other, and they began to run across his shoe. Partridges came to his yard only just before and after there was a full snow cover.

The hounds often came nearby, hunting for fox. There once was a man from Lincoln who came to Thoreau's door looking for his dog. But upon finding Thoreau he was so curious about Thoreau's purpose in living at Walden that he barely paid attention to Thoreau's information on the hounds.

After telling about this encounter, Thoreau recounts the story of an old hunter who was on his own, and the Weston Squire's hounds, which chased a fox to him, and were dumbfounded when they found the fox already shot. The hunter got to keep the skin, even though he offered it to the Squire. There was also Sam Nutting, who hunted bears in exchange for rum. Thoreau would often hear hounds baying at night as he passed.

The mice thinned the trees by gnawing around them for food during winter. There was a hare that lived under the floorboards with her litter. They looked unhealthy and scared until they moved, and then appeared graceful and beautiful, at home in the woods. Thoreau decides that the partridge and rabbit will always thrive because they are so close to the leaves and ground; one with wings, the other with legs.

# The Pond in Winter

Thoreau begins this chapter awakening with a question put to him in the night, which was answered when he awoke again at dawn. The beauty of the light and his surroundings answers all his questions. After finding this answer, he turns to the morning work: finding water beneath a foot and a half of ice. The pond sleeps all winter like the animals, and when Thoreau cuts through the snow and ice to find the pond totally calm beneath, he finds heaven below as well as above.

Topic Tracking: Awakening for Reform 4

Many men come to fish in the morning:

*"Here is one fishing for pickerel with grown perch for bait. You look into his pail and wonder as into a summer pond, as if he kept summer locked up at home, or knew where she had retreated. How, pray, did he get these in mid-winter? O, he got worms out of rotten logs since the ground froze, and so he caught them. His life passes deeper in Nature than the studies of the naturalist penetrate; himself a subject for the naturalist. The latter raises the moss and bark gently with his knife in search of insects; the former lays open logs to their core with his axe, and moss and bark fly far and wide....Such a man has come to fish, and I love to see Nature carried out in him. The perch swallows the grub-worm, the pickerel swallow the perch, and the fisherman swallows the pickerel; and so all the chinks in the scale of being are filled."* The Pond in Winter, pp. 230-31

The pickerel in Walden are beautifully colored. This is especially amazing in the white winter environment of Walden.

Walden was thought to be bottomless, and remained untested, for years. During the winter, Thoreau tested it and found it to be 102 feet deep (107 since it has risen), which is uncommon, but not unreasonable. He sounded it with a rope tied to a stone. Thoreau is thankful that it is so deep and pure.

*"While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless."* The Pond in Winter, pg. 232

A factory owner to whom Thoreau related this information wouldn't believe it was so deep because he thought it was too steep for the sand to stay against the sides, but Thoreau thinks Walden has a cup shape, like many features of the surrounding landscape. If Walden were empty, Thoreau thinks it would look just like the surrounding meadows. He bases this on his finding that in the deepest area of the pond, it is flat for several acres. Thoreau also found that the deepest point was in the exact middle of the map. He wonders if this is a universal rule. Another rule he considers as universal is that coves all had shallow water at their mouths and deeper water inside, which knows happens in other places. He wonders if there is a formula that will solve all these questions one day.



*"If we knew all the laws of Nature, we should need only one fact, or the description of one actual phenomenon, to infer all the particular results at that point. Now we know only a few laws, and our result is vitiated...by our ignorance of essential elements in the calculation. Our notions of law and harmony are commonly confined to those instances which we detect; but the harmony which results from a far greater number seemingly conflicting, but really concurring, laws, which we have not detected, is still more wonderful. The particular laws are as our points of view, as, to the traveller, a mountain outline varies with every step, and it has an infinite number of profiles, though absolutely but one form. Even when cleft or bored through it is not comprehended in its entirety." The Pond in Winter, pp. 234-35*

Thoreau goes on to consider whether or not this is true in ethics as well. Do we not know a man by the length and breadth of the whole of his behaviors, and his depth by referring to the surrounding landscape? Each person has his or her own inlets - particular emotional issues with a bar across their entrance that threatens to separate and consume a person when a storm comes. Thoreau mourns that we get stuck on shore too often, and get industrialized, and therefore have no individualized currents.

Some ice cutters who come to the pond suggest to Thoreau that there might be a leach hole in the middle that probably leads to a nearby meadow. They also find ice from one area of the pond that is much thinner, which suggests that there is an undetected inlet or spring there.

The ice moves with the wind, which leads Thoreau to wonder if we could detect such movement in the earth if we had the proper instruments. He notices this when he cut holes in the ice and the water runs over them as the ice dips.

In 1846-47, a huge crew of ice cutters come to the pond for sixteen days to gather ice for sale. Because he knows that a lot of New England ice is sold in India, Thoreau gets excited about the water from Walden mingling with the sacred water of the Ganges as it melts. But, this ice never quite made it because it looked like the wrong color (green, from close up), and instead was used locally. It was so hard and thick that it didn't all melt until September 1848. From far away the ice is blue - distinct and beautiful. Thoreau believes it may be because of the air it contains. He is obviously proud of the ice that comes from Walden.

# Spring

Walden Pond is always the last one in the area to break up both because it has no stream running through it, and because it is so deep. However, Walden undergoes a steady and uninterrupted temperature increase while other ponds fluctuate wildly during early spring. The ice melts from the sun shining from above, as well as from the sun reflected off the water below.

*"The day is an epitome of the year."* Spring, pg. 241

The pond booms in the morning and at night when the ice is tight. Then it is loose during the heat of the day and stops making noise. It melts in layers, and it happens very suddenly. Here, Thoreau inserts the story of the man who took his boat down the Sudbury River to Fair Haven pond, which was still covered in ice. He hid in the bushes to hunt ducks, and heard a groan, which he thought was some sort of animal. It turned out to be the sound of the ice hitting the pond's edge and breaking up.

The next thing that Thoreau notices and celebrates is the snow melting on the railroad banks. The snow comes down the sides of the bank in swirls of different, beautiful colors that look like leaves. Thoreau spends a while describing leaves, calling them the outward expression of the earth. Because the sun affects one side of the bank at a time, it looks as if earth is experimenting with its palette - one side is full of spirals, the other remains snow-covered. Everything is a sort of leaf in nature: wings, trees, and feathers, even ice as it begins to form. The earth itself is leaf-shaped, with its rivers spreading out through the continents. The towns are insects. The swirls begin again each morning, and remind Thoreau of how blood vessels might be formed as a fetus grows, branching out. He likens people to a mass of thawing clay. This thawing and spreading out is like the release of excrement, but Thoreau believes that this is good. It assures us that even Nature has bowels. This is the first part of spring, before the poetic part. It is when the earth is proven to be alive again.

Next come the first buds of spring, as the frost disappears from the ground. The squirrels came back to the house under the floorboards. Thoreau found the first sparrow of spring to be very exciting. The grass is like flames of warmth from the earth as it responds to the sun's warmth. The sparrow is helping to crack the ice of Walden with his calls. Walden is becoming alive again, but very suddenly, so that Thoreau describes spring and the change in light as a "crisis."

Topic Tracking: My House Outdoors 6

The robins came and proved that spring was here; the first spring night for Thoreau in his cabin. After them came the geese and pigeons. Then, with a gentle rain, the prospects get better (and greener).

*"Why the jailer does not leave open his prison doors - why the judge does not dismiss his case - why the preacher does not dismiss his congregation! It is because they do*

*not obey the hint which God gives them, nor accept the pardon which he freely offers all."* Spring, pg. 251

At the end of April, Thoreau saw a hawk while fishing. First he heard a rattling and then he saw the extraordinarily graceful hawk. It went back and forth from tumbling through the air to gliding on the wind. It seemed separated from its mother and the land, almost suspended in air.

Topic Tracking: Awakening for Reform 5

*"when the wild river valley and the woods were bathed in so pure and bright a light as would have waked the dead, if they had been slumbering in their graves, as some suppose. There needs no stronger proof of immortality. All things must live in such a light. O Death, where was thy sting? O Grave, where was thy victory then?"* Spring, pg. 252

Without the wilderness around a village, a village would remain stagnant. We need to explore and be refreshed by nature. Thoreau is refreshed by hearing the whip-poor-will, brown-thrasher, veery, wood-pewee, chewink, and other birds at the beginning of May. These sounds take us to the end of Thoreau's first year in the woods. He states simply that the second year was very similar.

# Conclusion

It is important to travel and have a varied experience, but that can be had just by refusing to be fenced in by the physical fences we build around our land.

*"we think that if rail-fences are pulled down, and stone-walls piled up on our farms, bounds are henceforth set to our lives and our fates decided. If you are chosen town clerk, forsooth, you cannot go to Tierra del Fuego this summer: but you may go to the land of infernal fire nevertheless. The universe is wider than our views of it."* Conclusion, pg. 254

Don't explore land - explore yourself and your vastness. He talks about disobeying laws to learn about the sacred laws of society, and says that there are far more sacred laws than those of society, especially because of the absence of a just government in the world.

Topic Tracking: Awakening for Reform 6

*"I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the Highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now."* Conclusion, pg. 257

Thoreau feels that it is important not to be discouraged, but rather to pursue the truth of one's life.

*"In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty, nor weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."* Conclusion, pg. 257

Do not think that it is of utmost importance to speak so others will understand you. That is a mistake of the English and Americans. You should be able to communicate with your ox, and remember the truth. That is the most important language to know. Language does not do justice to the truth, because it merely translates it.

Topic Tracking: Awakening for Reform 7

Common sense is dull, and is like men snoring and sleeping. However, do not despair if you are not part of a great civilization. Be the best of that mediocre civilization that you can.



After these admonishments, Thoreau tells a made up story about a man from Kouroo, a made up city in India, who spent his life trying to carve the perfect walking stick, and so outlasted civilization. He outlived all other life in the world because his time slowed down, it was so sacred.

Even if you are poor, the sun looks the same to you and a rich man. If you are poor, you deal with the most important and basic experiences of your life, and are richer for your attention to those things.

*"As I stand over the insect crawling amid the pine needles on the forest floor, and endeavoring to conceal itself from my sight, and ask myself why it will cherish those humble thoughts, and hide its head from me who might, perhaps, be its benefactor, and impart to its race some cheering information, I am reminded of the greater Benefactor and Intelligence that stands over me the human insect."* Conclusion, pg. 263

Do not think that we cannot change the world. Take an example from Nature, which is constantly changing, and bringing great changes to people's lives.

Topic Tracking: Water 9

Water has changed the landscape around us dramatically, and may do so again. Nature will live on and change around us all the time. Any regular person may not realize this, but the light must come up. The morning star, the sun, must rise and continue to circle, and so these truths will continue on.