# 1 Contemporary Commentary

# Gretel Ehrlich Introduces Walden by Henry David Thoreau

When I was in high school, my parents took me to look at colleges on the East Coast, and on that trip, we visited Walden Pond. I'd bought a collection of Thoreau's essays at a bookstore in Boston, and standing at the edge of the pond, I read Walden. My parents had lived nearby before I was born, but I grew up on the central California coast. Thoreau's landscape was not familiar to me, and yet the ideas he expressed in his book-length essay Walden spoke to me as no others had.

Living From the Inside Out An essay is essentially a way of asking a question. It is an attempt to understand the nature of things: the human condition and the natural world. Thoreau's questions to me, the reader, asked me to think about where I lived and how I lived in that place. That "owning" land or a house is not as important as becoming friends with that place. That rich and poor are unimportant, but that how you meet your life and how you live from moment to moment, day to day, is most important of all.

Living comes from the inside out, not from an outsider's view of who you are. Life is change. The weather changes, our relationships with one another change, our bodies change. To be static is to be dead. To live in harmony with nature means to roll with those changes daily, yearly, moment by moment.

Contemplating One Ripple in the Pond These days we go about our lives with so much speed and so much extraneous information that it's difficult to contemplate just one thing, one sight, one evening or morning, one ripple in the pond. Thoreau would have us simplify, slow down, become quiet, and burrow into the heart of things with our minds. Not to "dumb down," but the opposite: to stop, listen, and see; to turn off the monologue in our minds; to erase our idea about how things are; to live in others' shoes.

Building a Fire in the Mind Thoreau would have us think like a river, a pond, a tree, another animal or human; to adopt their point of view instead of our own; to build a fire in the mind with real wood and a match that cannot be extinguished. Then, the fresh, dawnlike nature of things—what



# Meet the Author

Gretel Ehrlich is the author of more than a dozen works of nonfiction, fiction, and poetry, including the essay collection The Solace of Open Spaces and The Future of Ice: A Journey Into Cold. For more information about Ehrlich, see page 223.

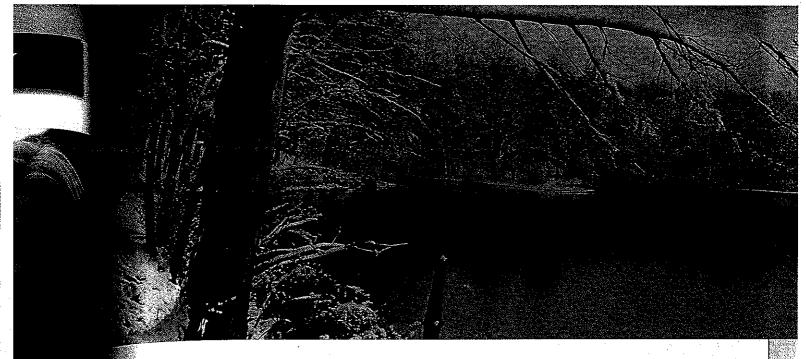
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Marching to confidently in be our own p ate about wha drummer," if unafraid to b€ through all ou

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Thoreau calls "the auroral character"—will keep radiating, piercing the difficulties in our lives with new songs. A hut in the woods, a still pond, a fresh breeze: these morning winds carry poems, music, love, and loss into our days. Not a dreaminess, but the direct experience of life as it is.

Marching to a Different Drummer Thoreau encourages us to advance confidently in the direction of our dreams. He encourages each of us to be our own person—distinct, unique, thoughtful, precise, and passionate about what we love in the world. It is good to march to "a different drummer," if that's where our feet take us. To live fully, deeply, profoundly, unafraid to be ourselves—this is advice that travels forward for centuries, through all our lives.

#### ▲ Critical Viewing

What details in this early hand-painted photograph of Walden Pond capture what Thoreau calls "the auroral character" of the setting?

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- 1. (a) What do Thoreau's questions ask Ehrlich—and all readers—to think about? (b) Interpret: In what way might Thoreau's questions help readers live "from the inside out"?
- 2. (a) What would Thoreau have people do in a complex world?(b) Speculate: How might following Thoreau's advice change the way you live in the twenty-first century?

#### As You Read from Walden . . .

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- **3.** Consider what relevance Thoreau's ideas have in today's world and in your own life.
- **4.** Think about the ways in which Ehrlich's commentary enriches your understanding of specific passages in Thoreau's essays.



# Before You Read

# from Walden • from Civil Disobedience

#### **Connecting to the Essential Question**

**Write:** In *Walden*, one of the most famous philosophical works in American literature, Thoreau explains his aim to live a simple life. Write a brief paragraph in which you discuss your goals for living.



**Look for It:** Notice details that show Thoreau's goals and values. This will help as you reflect on the Essential Question: **How does literature shape or reflect society?** 

#### **Literary Analysis**

An **author's style** is the unique manner in which he or she puts thoughts into words. Elements of style include an author's *diction*, or word choice, and *syntax*, or arrangement of words in sentences. Thoreau's style has a conversational **tone**, or attitude, as though he is talking to a friend. He also "thinks" in images, often using a series of **figurative expressions** to develop ideas. For example, in *Walden*, Thoreau explains that modern life is too complex. He illustrates the point with a series of concrete examples:

- First, he uses a **metaphor**, a figure of speech that shows a similarity between two or more unlike things without using the words "like" or "as": In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands...
- Next, he uses an **analogy,** an extended comparison of relationships: "Our life is like a German Confederacy, made up of petty states . . ."

As you read, notice how these elements help to enhance Thoreau's ideas.

#### **Reading Strategy**

As a reader, you are not obligated to accept everything you see in print. When reading essays of opinion, analyze the author's implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions. Implicit ideas are only suggested, while explicit ideas are directly stated. First, ask yourself what fundamental beliefs the author holds about life. Then, identify the support the author provides. Decide if that support is convincing. As you read, use a chart like the one shown to analyze Thoreau's philosophical assumptions.

#### Vocabulary

dilapidated (də lap' ə dāt' id) adj. in disrepair (p. 381)

**sublime** (se blīm') *adj.* noble; majestic (p. 383)

superfluous (sə pur' floo əs) adj. excessive; not necessary (p. 383)

magnanimity (mag' nə nim' ə tē) n. generosity (p. 386)

**expedient** (ek spē' dē ent) *n*. resource (p. 388)

**alacrity** (ə lak' rə tē) *n.* speed (p. 389)

#### Thoreau's idea:

People should simplify their lives: "Simplify, simplify"

#### Supporting Details:

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#### Am I Convinced?

- Yes, because...
- No, because...





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# Henry David Thoreau

#### Author of Walden and "Civil Disobedience"

Henry David Thoreau was known by his Concord, Massachusetts, neighbors as an eccentric. As a child he rarely followed rules and was independent and strong-willed. He pursued a formal education at his mother's insistence. Thoreau attended Concord Academy, a college preparatory school, and later enrolled at Harvard University. Although Harvard's dress code required students to wear black coats, Thoreau wore a green one.

Questioning Authority When his objections to corporal punishment forced him to quit his first teaching job, Thoreau and his older brother John opened their own school in Concord. The school was successful, but they had to close it when John became ill.

In 1841, Thoreau moved into the house of another famous Concord resident, Ralph Waldo Emerson. He lived there for two years, performing odd jobs to pay for his room and board. Fascinated by Emerson's Transcendentalist ideas, Thoreau became Emerson's friend and disciple. Rather than return to teaching, he decided to devote his energies to exploring the spiritual relationship between humanity and nature and to living by his political and social beliefs.

On Walden Pond From 1845 to 1847, Thoreau lived alone in a one-room cabin he built at Walden Pond near Concord. This experience provided him with the material for his masterwork, Walden (1854). A blend of natural observation, social criticism, and philosophical insight, Walden is now generally regarded as the supreme work of Transcendentalist literature and one of the greatest examples of nature writing in American literature.

When he died of tuberculosis at the age of forty-four, Thoreau had received little public recognition. Only A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers and some poems had been published—at his own expense—while he was alive. The Maine Woods, Cape Cod, and A Yankee in Canada were published posthumously. Nevertheless, Emerson knew that future generations would cherish Thoreau. Speaking at his funeral, Emerson said: "The country knows not yet, or in the least part, how great a son it has lost. . . . His soul was made for the noblest society; he had in a short life exhausted the capabilities of this world; wherever there is knowledge, wherever there is virtue, wherever there is beauty, he will find a home."

(1817-1862)

Be true to your work, your word, and your friend."





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# From Malego Henry David Thoreau



#### from Where I Lived, and What I Lived For

At a certain season of our life we are accustomed to consider every spot as the possible site of a house. I have thus surveyed the country on every side within a dozen miles of where I live. In imagination I have bought all the farms in succession, for all were to be bought, and I knew their price. I walked over each farmer's premises, tasted his wild apples, discoursed on husbandry with him, took his farm at his price, at any price, mortgaging it to him in my mind; even put a higher price on it—took everything but a deed of it—took his word for his deed, for I dearly love to talk cultivated it, and him too to some extent. I trust, and withdrew when I had enjoyed it long enough, leaving him to carry it on. This experience entitled me to be regarded as a sort of real-estate broker by my friends. Wherever I sat, there I might live, and the landscape radiated from me accordingly. What is a house but a sedes, a seat?—better if a country seat. I discovered many a site for a house not



Did Thoreau truly intend to purchase a farm?

**◄ Critical Viewing** Based on this picture of Walden Pond, what do you think it would be like to live in such a place? [Speculate]

<sup>1.</sup> husbandry (huz' ben drē) n. farming.

#### **Gretel Ehrlich** Scholar's Insight

Thoreau is saying that every rock is our home, every vista is ours to drink in. And as a result, the landscape comes into us, and pours out again as an image, a poem, a bit of music.

likely to be soon improved, which some might have thought too far from the village, but to my eyes the village was too far from it. Well, there might I live, I said; and there I did live, for an hour, a summer and a winter life; saw how I could let the years run off, buffet the winter through, and see the spring come in. The future inhabitants of this region, wherever they may place their houses, may be sure that they have been anticipated. An afternoon sufficed to lay out the land into orchard woodlot and pasture, and to decide what fine oaks or pines should be left to stand before the door, and whence each blasted tree could be seen to the best advantage; and then I let it lie, fallow<sup>2</sup> perchance, for a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.

My imagination carried me so far that I even had the refusal of several farms—the refusal was all I wanted—but I never got my fingers burned by actual possession. The nearest that I came to actual possession was when I bought the Hollowell Place, and had begun to sort my seeds, and collected materials with which to make a wheelbarrow to carry it on or off with; but before the owner gave me a deed of it, his wife-every man has such a wife-changed her mind and wished to keep it, and he offered me ten dollars to release him. Now, to speak the truth, I had but ten cents in the world, and it surpassed my arithmetic to tell, if I was that man who had ten cents, or who had a farm, or ten dollars, or all together. However, I let him keep the ten dollars and the farm too, for I had carried it far enough; or rather to be generous, I sold him the farm for just what I gave for it, and, as he was not a rich man, made him a present of ten dollars, and still had my ten cents, and seeds, and materials for a wheelbarrow left. I found thus that I had been a rich man without any damage to my poverty. But I retained the landscape, and I have since annually car ried off what it yielded without a wheelbarrow. With respect to landscapes:

"I am monarch of all I survey, My right there is none to dispute."<sup>3</sup>

I have frequently seen a poet withdraw, having enjoyed the most valuable part of a farm, while the crusty farmer supposed that he had got a few wild apples only. Why, the owner does not know it for many years when a poet has put his farm in rhyme, the most admirable kind of invisible fence, has fairly impounded it, milked it, skimmed it, and got all the cream, and left the farmer only the skimmed milk.

The real attractions of the Hollowell farm, to me, were: its complete retirement, being about two miles from the village, half a mile from the nearest neighbor, and separated from the highway by a broad field; its bounding on the river, which the owner said protected

Literary Analysis Author's Style and Metaphor Identify the metaphor Thoreau uses in this paragraph and the idea it helps him develop.

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<sup>2.</sup> fallow (fai' ō) adj. left uncultivated or unplanted.

<sup>3. &</sup>quot;I... dispute" from William Cowper's Verses Supposed to Be Written by Alexander Selkirk.

<sup>4.</sup> Atlas (a

<sup>5.</sup> Old Cat

<sup>6.</sup> chantic

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it by its fogs from frosts in the spring, though that was nothing to me; the gray color and ruinous state of the house and barn, and the dilapidated fences, which put such an interval between me and the last occupant; the hollow and lichen-covered apple trees, gnawed by rabbits, showing what kind of neighbors I should have; but above all. the recollection I had of it from my earliest voyages up the river, when the house was concealed behind a dense grove of red maples, through which I heard the house-dog bark. I was in haste to buy it, before the proprietor finished getting out some rocks, cutting down the hollow apple trees, and grubbing up some young birches which had sprung up in the pasture, or, in short, had made any more of his improvements. To enjoy these advantages I was ready to carry it on; like Atlas,4 to take the world on my shoulders-I never heard what compensation he received for that—and do all those things which had no other motive or excuse but that I might pay for it and be unmolested in my possession of it; for I knew all the while that it would yield the most abundant crop of the kind I wanted if I could only afford to let it alone. But it turned out as I have said.

All that I could say, then, with respect to farming on a large scale (I have always cultivated a garden) was that I had had my seeds ready. Many think that seeds improve with age. I have no doubt that time discriminates between the good and the bad; and when at last I shall plant, I shall be less likely to be disappointed. But I would say to my fellows, once for all, As long as possible live free and uncommitted. It makes but little difference whether you are committed to a farm or the county jail.

Old Cato,5 whose "De Re Rustica" is my "Cultivator," says, and the only translation I have seen makes sheer nonsense of the passage, "When you think of getting a farm, turn it thus in your mind, not to buy greedily; nor spare your pains to look at it, and do not think it enough to go round it once. The oftener you go there the more it will please you, if it is good." I think I shall not buy greedily, but go round and round it as long as I live, and be buried in it first, that it may please me the more at last. . . .

I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer<sup>6</sup> in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.

When first I took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there, which, by accident, was on Independence Day, or the fourth of July, 1845, my house was not finished for winter, but was merely a defense against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough weatherstained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night. The upright white hewn studs and freshly planed door and window casings gave

Vocabulary dilapidated (de lap' e dāt' id) adj. in disrepair

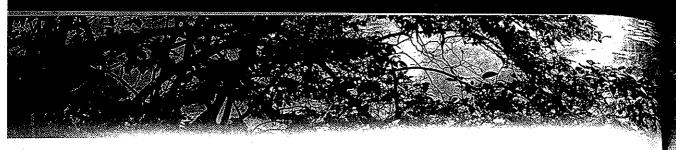
Reading Strategy Analyzing the **Author's Philosophical** Assumptions What do you think the idea of freedom means to Thoreau?



What were the "real attractions" of the Hollowell farm to Thoreau?

Atlas (at' les) from Greek mythology, a Titan who supported the heavens on his shoulders.

<sup>5.</sup> Old Cato Roman statesman (234–149 B.c.). "De Re Rustica" is Latin for "Of Things Rustic." 6. chanticleer (chan' to klir') n. rooster.



# Gretel Ehrlich Scholar's Insight

Thoreau comes to Walden Pond with a "beginner's mind." He allows the earth to instruct him in its ways, leaving preconceptions behind. That is how writers must approach all things, as a student of the world.

it a clean and airy look, especially in the morning, when its timbers were saturated with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude from them. To my imagination it retained throughout the day more or less of this auroral character, reminding me of a certain house on a mountain which I had visited the year before. This was an airy and unplastered cabin, fit to entertain a traveling god, and where a goddess might trail her garments. The winds which passed over my dwelling were such as sweep over the ridges of mountains, bearing the broken strains, or celestial parts only, of terrestrial

7. auroral (ô rōr' əl) adj. resembling the dawn.

#### WORLD LITERATURE CONNECTION GREEK GODS: MOUNT LYMPUS ENGOETHEGODS AND BUTRORHUMANUU ► When Thoreau says, "Olympus is but the APHRODITE GODDESS OF LOVE ▼ outside of the earth everywhere" he is referring to Mount Olympus, which is both a APOLLO real mountain in northern Greece and the GOR OF THE SUNAND MUST home of the gods and goddesses in Greek mythology. The ancient Greeks pictured their GOD OF WAR gods in human form with human flaws, so Olympus was not perfect. However, as a place HERMES of beauty, harmony, and enlightenment, HOD OF TRADE it was more wonderful than anything mortals POSEIDON: could achieve. GOD OF THE SEA **CONNECT TO THE LITERATURE** HADES GODOTHE What attitude toward nature does Thoreau express with his metaphor about Olympus?

music. The morn terrupted; but for side of the earth

I went to the only the essenti to teach, and no I did not wish to wish to practice to live deep and and Spartanlike swath and shav lowest terms, as and genuine me or if it were sub true account of me, are in a str of God, and hav of man here to

Still we live were long ago c it is error upon for its occasion is frittered awar more than his toes, and lump your affairs be instead of a mi your thumbnai such are the cl and-one items not founder an dead reckoning succeeds. Simp necessary eat 1 other things in

<sup>8.</sup> Spartanlike like to be hardy, stoi

<sup>9. &</sup>quot;glorify . . . fore Westminster cat

<sup>10.</sup> like ... cranes

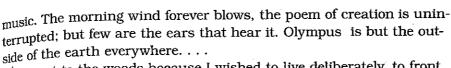
<sup>11.</sup> dead reckoning

<sup>12.</sup> German Confe

n its timbers some sweet ned throughnding me of year before. a traveling winds which

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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 Spartanlike<sup>8</sup> 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. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes:10 it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumbnail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousandand-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning,11 and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. Our life is like a German Confederacy, 12

#### Gretel Ehrlich Scholar's Insight

Thoreau encourages us to face all that life brings to us, both its painful and beautiful sides. There cannot be one without the other.

#### Vocabulary

**sublime** (sə blīm') *adj.* noble; majestic

superfluous (soo perf floo es) adj. excessive; not necessary



Why did Thoreau go to the woods?

<sup>8</sup> Spartanlike like the people of Sparta, an ancient Greek state whose citizens were known to be hardy, stoical, simple, and highly disciplined.

<sup>&</sup>quot;glorify...forever" the answer to the question "What is the chief end of man?" in the Westminster catechism.

Dike... cranes In the Iliad, the Trojans are compared to cranes fighting against pygmies.

<sup>11</sup> dead reckoning navigating without the assistance of stars.

12 German Confederacy At the time, Germany was a loose union of thirty-nine independent states, with no common government.

▼ Critical Viewing

This picture shows a replica of Thoreau's cabin. How does it help you understand his point that people should work on the quality of their lives rather than the things they own? [Interpret]

made up of petty states, with its boundary forever fluctuating, so that even a German cannot tell you how it is bounded at any moment. The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it as for them is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain. If we do not get out sleepers,13 and forge rails, and devote days and nights to the work, but go to tinkering upon our lives to improve them, who will build railroads? And if railroads are not built, how shall we get to heaven in season? But if we stay at home and mind our business, who will want railroads? We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. . . .

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not, the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day  ${\mathbb F}$ was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things. I do not wish to be any more busy with my hands than is necessary. My head is hands and feet I feel all my best faculties con-

centrated in it. My instinct tells me that my head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout and forepaws, and with it! would mine and burrow my way through these hills. I think that the richest vein is somewhere here abouts; so by the divining rod14 and thin rising vapors I judge; and here I will begin to mine. . . .

from Th

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<sup>13.</sup> sleepers (sle perz) n. ties supporting railroad tracks.

<sup>14.</sup> divining rod a forked branch or stick alleged to reveal underground water or minerals.

<sup>15.</sup> almshot

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### from The Conclusion

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pondside; 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.

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness 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. . . .

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. It is not important that he should mature as soon as an apple tree or an oak. Shall he turn his spring into summer? If the condition of things which we were made for is not yet, what were any reality which we can substitute? We will not be shipwrecked on a vain reality. Shall we with pains erect a heaven of blue glass over ourselves, though when it is done we shall be sure to gaze still at the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not? . . .

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The faultfinder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse<sup>15</sup> as brightly as from the rich man's

Literary Analysis
Author's Style and
Metaphor What metaphor
does Thoreau use in the
sentence beginning "If a
man does not keep pace
with his companions . .?"
What idea does it help him
develop?



What does Thoreau claim to have learned from his experiment in living?

<sup>15;</sup> almshouse n. home for people too poor to support themselves.

#### Gretel Ehrlich Scholar's Insight

To cultivate poverty is a radical thought and one that has been alive throughout history. Poverty in this sense means simplicity, like the "poverty" of an animal that wears only its own fur coat. The mind and the imagination are our true wealth.

**Reading Strategy** Analyzing the **Author's Philosophical** Assumptions Thoreau has strong opinions about how people should live, as shown in his advice to "cultivate poverty." Has he convinced you? Explain.

Vocabulary magnanimity (mag' ne nim' ə tē) n. generosity.

abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I donot see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace. The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. Maybe they are simply great hows what beauti enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable. Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do not want society. If I were confined to a corner of a garret le all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts about me. The philosopher said: "From an army of three divisions one can take away its general, and put it in disorder; from the man the most abject and vulgar one cannot take away his thought." Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to many influences to be played on; it is all dissipation. Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights. The shadows of poverty and meanness gather around us, "and lo! creation widens to our view."17 We are often reminded that if there were bestowed on us the wealth of Croesus,18 our aims must still be the same, and our means essentially the same. Moreover, if you are restricted in your range by poverty, if you cannot buy books and newspapers, for instance, you are but confined to the most significant and vital experiences; you are compelled to deal with the material which yields the most sugar and the most starch. It is life near the bone where it is sweetest. You are defended from being a trifler. No man loses ever on a lower level by magnanimity on a higher. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul. . . .

The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands even this may be the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats. It was not always dry land where we dwell. I see far inland the banks which the stream anciently washed, before science began to record its freshets. Everyone has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers

16. garret (gar 'it) n. attic.

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## Critical Re

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<sup>17.&</sup>quot;and . . . view" from the sonnet "To Night" by British poet Joseph Blanco White (1775-1841).

<sup>18.</sup> Croesus (kre ses) King of Lydia (d. 546 B.C.), believed to be the wealthiest person of his time.