

Study Question on Emerson and Thoreau's Required Readings

Study Questions for Emerson's Nature

1. What exactly does Emerson mean in Nature when he writes, "Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put"? How does this comment relate to his thesis about nature?
 2. What distinction does Emerson make between Nature in the philosophical and common senses? Does Emerson's insistence that this distinction is unimportant still make sense in today's world? Why or why not?
 3. What does Emerson mean when he says he becomes "a transparent eye-ball"?
 4. How does Emerson's essay combine philosophical and poetic insight?
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Study Questions for Emerson, "The American Scholar"

1. What complaints does Emerson have about American culture?
 2. What is the difference between "Man Thinking" and the "mere thinker"?
 3. What is the relationship between nature and the human mind?
 4. What is the proper use of books?
 5. What place does action have in the life of the scholar?
 6. What are the social duties of the American scholar?
 7. What "signs of the times" does Emerson perceive and what significance does he find in them?
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Study Questions for Thoreau's Walden

1. What audience does Thoreau imagine for his work?
2. What complaints does Thoreau have about American life?
3. Why did Thoreau go to live in the woods?
4. In the chapter called "The Ponds" Thoreau records numerous specific observations and anecdotes about Walden Pond. Why do these details interest him? What symbolic or universal value do they have for him?
5. What information does Thoreau offer about Walden's past? What significance does this history have?
6. How does Walden differ from other ponds in the area? Why is Thoreau interested in these differences?
7. What relationships do you find between Emerson's and Thoreau's essays? Do they share a similar vision of nature? Of America? Would Thoreau qualify as Emerson's American scholar?