

US History
Mr. Minervini
Ch. 9 Religion and Reform 1815-1865
Transcendentalism/Into the Wild Journal Reflection Assignment

We have been discussing Transcendentalists, specifically Henry David Thoreau, and his choices to examine his life and “transcend” society by living “deliberately” in the woods around Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. After our in-class reading and discussion I would like you to write 3 journal entries that follow the criteria found below. Please keep in mind the major beliefs of the Transcendentalists: Belief that man is naturally (born) good, in favor of private/solitary “soul searching” rather than group worship and rituals, in favor self-reliance, strong moral values, and acting according to your own beliefs, not necessarily those of society.

Objectives:

1. To further acquaint you with the life of Henry David Thoreau and the significance of his writings
2. To introduce you to well-known quotations of Thoreau as a window to his literary works.
3. Engage in thinking and writing activities that not only mimic those of Thoreau but allow for you to engage in self-examination of your life, society, as well people- both acquaintances and strangers- in our society.

About journal writing...

1. Journal writing is a means of self-examination and self-discovery allowing you to freely tap into your inner lives and creativity.
2. To be authentic and unique, journal writing must be **honest** and **specific**.
3. You should reread your work/writing immediately because often new ideas present themselves. Rereading entries aloud (privately or to a partner) can also stir new thoughts in the writer’s mind.
4. If the journals are to have any personal or educational value, it is important that they be written sincerely and thoughtfully. This is more important than length. It would not be useful if you approached the journal writing as a task to complete an hour before class.

Writer’s Challenge: Select sometime over the next week when you will choose to be alone. Schedule the time with yourself, and like Thoreau, use it for both inner and outer exploration. Reflect on your own life (who you are, what you’ve done, and what you’ll do), as well as your perceptions of our country/society, and the world.

You will complete 4 total entries; the first two are here and the last two will be given during and after the screening of the film *Into the Wild*.

1. People in Society/Examination of Others and Connection and Interdependency of Life:

Find a spot in a public place where you can sit apart and away from others and observe people. Keep these Thoreau quotes in mind when responding:

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.”

“All (people) are children, and of one family. The same tale sends them all to bed, and wakes them in the morning.”

A. What makes you different (**outside of the visible**) than the people you are observing?

B. Do you feel any connection to these people? Why or why not?

C. Are we obligated to assist/help those we do not know?

Give specifics for each answer.

2. Self-Reliance: Find a place in the woods or away from people in nature and reflect upon your life to the present. Reflect upon this Thoreau quote in your writing:

“What I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think... You will always find those who think they know what your duty is better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.”

A. How much freedom do you think you should have in regards to your life and decisions surrounding it, given your current age, intelligence, amount of experiences, character and other personal attributes?

B. What do you believe is the proper balance between trusting and relying on others versus being self-reliant and independent?

Assessment:

Your grade will depend on the quality, fullness and depth of your journal entries, as well as how closely you have followed the guidelines and the amount of mental and written effort placed on each entry.

Please write your name and the quote and entry number/title on the top of the pages when submitting.

Each entry must be hand written (of no less than 200 words/one paragraph) and handed in by its due date for teacher evaluation.

Each journal entry that meets the above criteria will be worth 20 points.

Due Dates will be announced in class and posted on our website.

This third journal assignment is based on the film *Into The Wild* as well as readings from the book of the same name by Jon Krakauer.

3. **New Experiences**: Find a place in the woods or away from others where you are surrounded by nature and then reflect upon the quote and answer the questions as honestly as possible.

Chris McCandless while in South Dakota wrote this to a friend: “*The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun*”.

- A. What are the possible benefits and advantages (to you as a person), if any, in gaining new experiences?
- B. When was the last time you had a genuinely new experience? What did it do for you? If you have not had one, what is holding you back?

Assessment:

Your grade will depend on the quality, fullness and depth of your journal entries, as well as how closely you have followed the guidelines and the amount of mental and written effort placed on each entry.

Please write your name and the quote and entry number/title on the top of the pages when submitting.

Each entry must be hand written (of no less than 200 words/one paragraph) and handed in by its due date for teacher evaluation.

Each journal entry that meets the above criteria will be worth 20 points.

Due Dates will be announced in class and posted on our website.

This final journal assignment is based on the film *Into The Wild* as well as readings from the book of the same name.

4. Final Entry: *Into the Wild*:

After viewing clips of the film *Into the Wild* and reading excerpts from the book of the same name; reflect upon what you have watched and read.

Here is the question:

Which of the two following views of the main character do you agree with?

Justify your position giving specifics from the film, the readings, and our discussions.

Jon Krakauer, in his best-selling book about Mr. McCandless, "*Into the Wild*," argues that Chris McCandless had sufficient skills to survive but might have inadvertently poisoned himself by eating the seeds of the wild sweet pea plant and far from being deranged, Mr. McCandless was a hero in the tradition of Jack London and Henry David Thoreau: a solitary man on a quest, an explorer of his own interior landscape, in search of a more authentic relation to the natural world and the experience of truly living.

While others, especially Alaskans like Nick Jans, had a differing view:

"Over the past 15 years, I've run into several McCandless types out in the country. Same story: idealistic, energetic young guys who overestimated themselves, underestimated the country, and ended up in trouble. McCandless was hardly unique; there's quite a few of these guys hanging around the state (Alaska), so much alike that they're almost a collective cliché. The only difference is that McCandless ended up dead, with the story of his dumbassness [sic] splashed across the media...(Jack London got it right in "To Build a Fire." McCandless is, finally, just a pale 20th century burlesque of London's protagonist, who freezes because he ignores advice and commits big-time hubris)..."

His ignorance, which could have been cured by a USGS quadrant and a Boy Scout manual, is what killed him. And while I feel for his parents, I have no sympathy for him. Such willful ignorance...amounts to disrespect for the land. ...McCandless's postcards, notes, and journals...read like the work of an above average, somewhat histrionic (melodramatic) high school kid--or am I missing something?"

Assessment:

Your grade will depend on the quality, fullness and depth of your journal entries, as well as how closely you have followed the guidelines and the amount of mental and written effort placed on each entry. Please write your name and the quote and entry number/title on the top of the pages when submitting. Each entry must be hand written (of no less than 200 words/one paragraph) and handed in by its due date for teacher evaluation. Each journal entry that meets the above criteria will be worth 20 points. Due Dates will be announced in class and posted on our website.