

Transcendentalism (1840-1860)

An important movement
in American philosophy and literature



Background: American Renaissance

Mid-1800's were a period of great social reforms:

- **Public schools**
- **Mental institutions**
- **Slavery**
- **Women's rights**



Utopian Communities



Numerous attempts to
create a perfect society
in communal living:

Brook Farm – for artists,
writers (emphasized
manual labor)

Fruitlands – vegetarian (no
animal labor)

Shakers - simple religion

Transcendentalist Beliefs



God



God is a spirit of goodness within nature and each person. All 3 are connected through the Over Soul:
(Nature=God=Man)

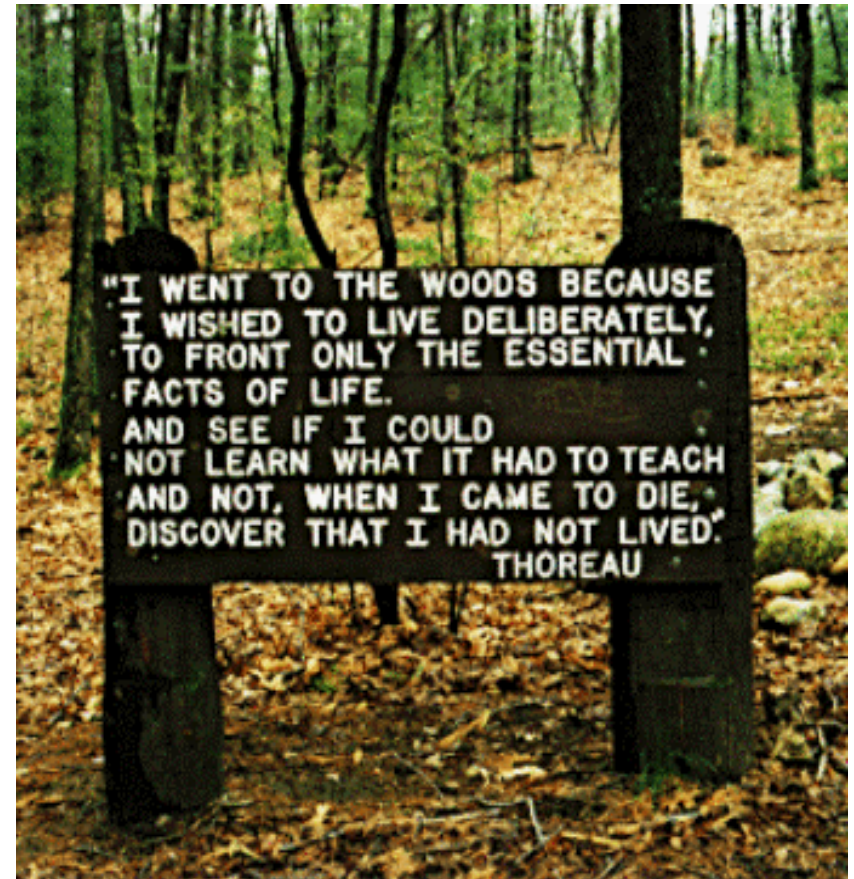
Nature

Man's intuition transcends (goes beyond) physical facts of nature to discover a higher truth of ideas (the landscape of the mind)



Individual

Emphasize self-reliance and being an individual; depend on yourself; live a simple life (moral and physical purity); don't seek financial success



Society



Optimistic and idealistic;
emphasize social reform; reject blind conformity to authority or tradition

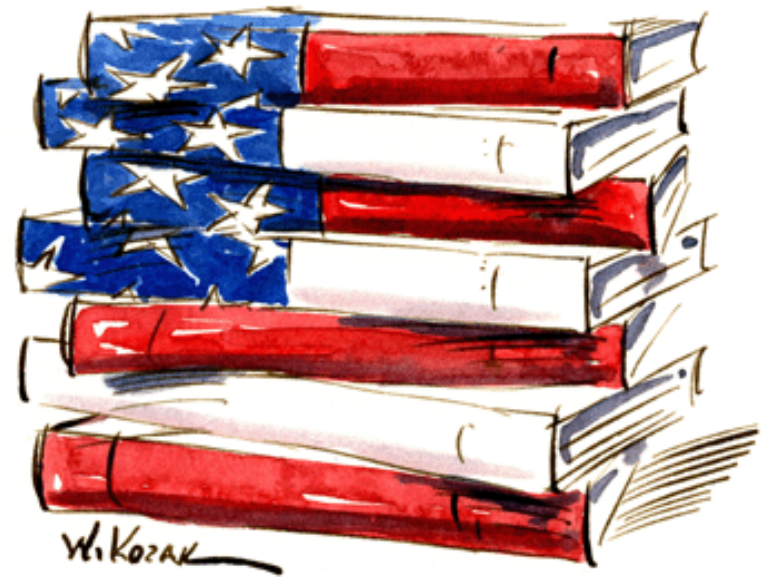
Ideas

Individual
inspiration and
spontaneous
emotions are
superior to
intellectual or
rational thinking



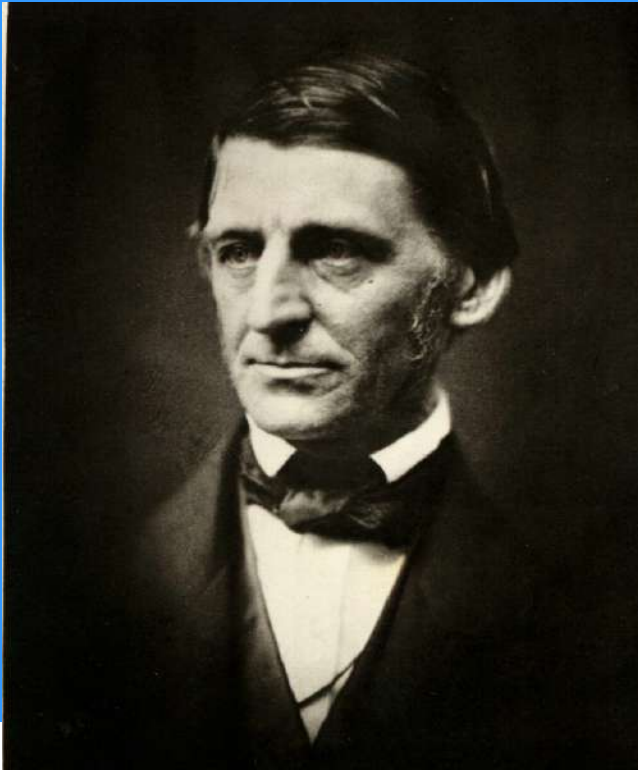
Literature

American literature finds its unique voice in novels, short stories, major forms of poetry



Authors

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Henry David Thoreau

