



Marching to the Beat of a Different Drum
The Impact of Transcendentalism in American Literature

Ponder this...

What do you think of when you hear the words *individual* or *individuality*?

To **conform** means to adapt oneself to accepted standards or customs. Write about a time when you had to **conform** in order to fit in (at school, at home, with friends). How did it make you feel?

Describe an experience you have had in nature (such as walking on the beach, playing in the woods, or going fishing). How did this experience make you feel?

What is Transcendentalism?

Transcend: To go beyond the limits of, to surpass

A literary, political, and philosophical movement started by Ralph Waldo Emerson during the 1830s, establishing a clear "American voice"

The belief that the natural world is a mirror to human life.

A belief that the individual is the center of the universe and is more powerful than religion and government

Stresses the importance of individuality.



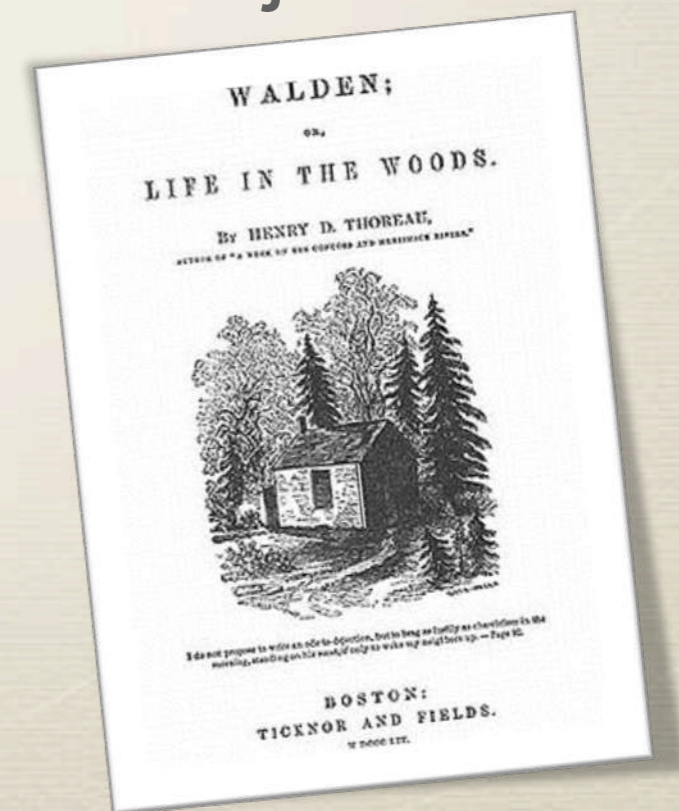
What is Transcendentalism?

Occurred after the Industrial Revolution which had shown machines could replace people, that individuals did not matter

Lasted only 10 years and produced only two major works:

Nature by Ralph Waldo Emerson

Walden by Henry David Thoreau



True Reality is Spiritual

Emerson was influenced by Immanuel Kant

“In determining the ultimate reality of God, the universe, the self, and other important matters, one must transcend, or go beyond, everyday human experience in the physical world”

--Immanuel Kant

(18th century German Philosopher)

Transcendentalist Views of the World

Everything in the world, including human beings, is a reflection of the Divine Soul: man, nature, and God are united as one.

The physical facts of the natural world are a doorway to the spiritual or ideal world.

People can use their intuition to behold God's spirit revealed in nature or in their own souls.

*"Always do what you are afraid to do."
-Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Transcendentalist View of the World

Self-reliance and individualism must outweigh external authority and blind conformity to custom and tradition.

Spontaneous feelings and intuition are superior to **intellectualism** and **rationality**.



Transcendentalism

For

Against

Nonconformity

Industrialization

Self-reliance

Urbanization

Free thought

Materialism

Confidence

Importance of nature

Transcendentalist Club

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Henry David Thoreau

Walt Whitman
(Influenced)



Ralph Waldo Emerson

1803-1882

Wrote *Nature*, "Self-Reliance", and "Concord Hymn"

One of the most quoted writers in American Literature

Encouraged at a young age to be an independent thinker

Went to Harvard

Was a pastor for three years



Emerson and Intuition

His mystical view of the world came from intuition not logic.

Intuition—Our capacity to know things immediately and without conscious reasoning. (Gut feeling; spidey senses)

Intuitive thought contrasted the rationalism of Franklin, Jefferson, and Henry.

"To be great is to be misunderstood."

Emerson and God

Emerson's optimism in man was a product of his idea that we can find God *directly* in nature.

God is good and works through nature.

We are separated from God causing our evil, but if we simply trust ourselves, we can know God directly.

"The individual is the world"

Modern Influences

Civil Disobedience

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi

Film:

Dead Poet's Society (1989)

Pleasantville (1998)

Into the Wild (2007)

Avatar (2009)

Music:

“Across the Universe”
by The Beatles

“Earth Song”
by Michael Jackson

“Fireflies”
by Owl City

“Where is the Love?”
by The Black Eyed Peas



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.

--Henry David Thoreau

