

## Session One

1. Introduce the basic characteristics and historical background of the transcendentalist movement. The following explanation can be used as a starting place:

From 1840-1855, literature in America experienced a rebirth called the New England Renaissance. Through their poetry, short stories, novels, and other works, writers during this period established a clear American voice. No longer did they see their work as less influential than that of European authors. Transcendentalism was a part of this "flowering" of American literature. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were important voices in this philosophical movement that sought to have individuals "transcend" to a higher spiritual level. To achieve this goal, the individual had to seek spiritual, not material, greatness and the essential truths of life through intuition. Emerson was the philosopher and teacher. Thoreau was the student and the practitioner. To learn more about this complex philosophy visit the [Web of American Transcendentalism](#).

2. Answer these questions in your composition book:
  - How are you affected by nature? Do you find comfort in it? Do you reflect the moods of nature?
  - What is the role of nature in your life?
  - What is meant by an individual's spiritual side? How do you define it?
  - Is there a connection between the individual's spirit and nature? If so, what is that connection?
  - What does it mean to know something intuitively? For example, has a parent or a sibling ever known something was wrong with you without having talked with or seen you? What do we mean when we say "I just know it"?
  - How do you demonstrate that you are an individual? Do you think independently of others or do you follow the crowd?
3. Established a definition of transcendentalism based on the answers to the above questions.

## Session Two

1. Read and answer questions over the excerpt from Emerson's "Nature" in your *Glencoe Book*, using the following questions to guide your exploration of the text. Record your responses in your notebook in Cornell Note format.
  - What different moods does Emerson note in the excerpt?
  - How is nature connected to these moods?

- What effect does nature have on Emerson? What does he mean when he says "I become a transparent eyeball"?
  - In what ways does Emerson connect nature, humankind, and God?
  - In what way does Nature serve as a teacher?
  - How is nature portrayed as noble? As a source of comfort?
  - How are human beings represented as part of nature?
  - What can human beings learn from nature? How does this learning affect the individual's spirituality?
2. Identify key quotations from the excerpt that reveal Emerson's thinking about the relationship between humans and nature and to record your observations in your journals. Explain the relationship between the quotations you have chosen and the basic characteristics of transcendentalism, as identified in the previous session.

### Session Three

2. Read Emerson's essay "[Self-Reliance](#)" as another text that demonstrates transcendental thought. This also can be found in the *Glencoe Book*.
3. Read the excerpt chosen from Emerson's "[Self-Reliance](#)" using the following questions to guide your exploration of the text. Record your responses in your notebook in Cornell Note format.
- What does Emerson mean when he says that "envy is ignorance and imitation is suicide"?
  - What does he want each individual to recognize about him/herself? What does he say about "power" and "work"?
  - How is trust a part of being self-reliant?
  - Why does Emerson see society as the enemy of individuality?
  - What is the role of nonconformity? What did that word mean to Emerson?
  - What is a "foolish consistency"? How does it get in the way of genius?
4. Identify the key elements of self-reliance as defined by Emerson in your readings. These elements should be generated by the responses to the questions.
5. To summarize the characteristics of transcendental thought covered so far in the lesson, have students fill in the [Examples of Transcendental Thought interactive](#) or [handout](#).

## Session Four

1. Read the excerpts from Thoreau's [Walden](#) which can also be found in your book.
2. Identify how Thoreau is practicing the philosophy Emerson writes about in the excerpts read previously. You can use the information that they have recorded on the [Examples of Transcendental Thought interactive](#) or [handout](#) as a resource at this point.
3. Explain the historical connection between the two writers: Emerson as teacher and Thoreau as practitioner.
4. Complete the [Examples of Transcendental Thought interactive](#) or copy of the handout. This time recording examples from Thoreau's writings.
5. Go back to the questions answered in Session One, and revise your responses based on what you have learned so far about Transcendentalism.
6. By the end of the session, you should have revised and clarified your understanding/working definition of transcendentalism
- 7.
8. .

## Session Five

1. You should look for examples of transcendental thought in popular culture. In particular, you'll be looking at comic strips and songs, but you may find examples in other media as well (e.g., sitcoms, television dramas, children's cartoons, movies, commercials) and bring them to class on Tuesday, January 22, 2013.