Walden

Study Guide Student Copy

Essay 1: Economy (Pgs. 1-13)

Vocabulary ascertained - learned for certain audited - performed an examination of financial accounts benefactors - helpers; people who offer aid of some sort compelled - driven to conformity - compliance; the state of being the same as all others contemplating - considering; thinking about curry - win degenerate – deteriorate discontented - not satisfied; uneasy divinity - godliness divulge - reveal draught – draft dross - waste, garbage, trash egotism - arrogance endeavored - tried, attempted exertions - actions undertaken under great stress exogenous - caused by factors outside the organism exorbitant - exceeding what is usual; outrageous factitious - rebellious fain - gladly frivolous – trivial gratuitously - in a manner that is not needed hindrances – things that prevent or undermine actions idly - without action; lazily impertinent - rude implements – tools impoverishing - making poor impunity - freedom from punishment, harm, or loss inconsolably - in the manner of one who is incapable of being soothed industrious - productive; driven to succeed insolvent - impoverished, bankrupt kindred – family lumbering – moving clumsily magnanimity – the act of being courageous or noble nigh - near obscurities - things that are vague and distant

observatory - a place where nature may be viewed and studied

obtrude - to push out palatable - appetizing penance - an act done to show sorrow over committing a sin perchance - perhaps; maybe praetors – ancient roman magistrates precedents - acts that justify later acts of the same kind profess – state openly progenitors - ancestors resignation - the act of giving oneself over, without resistance, to hopelessness or despair reverencing – treating with honor or respect sinecure - paying job requiring no work slough – shed subdue – to bring under control superfluously - exceeding what is necessary superintend - to have charge over; to direct or to manage trifling – not important valiant - brave vigilant - alertly watchful

1. Why do you think Thoreau singles out individual groups of readers as he begins his first essay?

2. What does Thoreau mean when he says that the "mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation?" (Pg. 4) Is this still true today?

3. What does Thoreau's story about the Indian basket weaver illustrate about his views on capitalism? (Pgs. 11-12)

Essay 1: Clothing (Pgs. 13-17)

Vocabulary

assimilated – became the same as all the other members of a population barbarous – harshly cruel conjecture – guess consanguinity – blood relationship consecrate – declare sacred cortex – the outer covering layer of an organism divested – stripped garret – attic heathen – an uncivil person; a person who is not a christian improvidence – the act of not providing for the future integument – a covering layer on an organism manifestation – display or demonstration operatives – secret agents pantaloon – close-fitting trousers which were fashionable for men in the 19th century procure – to get or obtain

1. What does Thoreau mean by saying, "I am sure there is greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience"? (Pg. 13)

2. Thoreau says it is an interesting question "how far men would retain their relative rank if they were divested of their clothes." (Pg. 14) Why do people need to tell others their rank simply by their clothing? Do ideas such as wearing uniforms help curtail some of this snobbery?

Essay 1: Shelter (Pgs. 17-26)

Vocabulary

almshouse - poorhouse assessors – those who evaluate possessions for tax purposes auger – a tool for boring holes behooves – is necessary or needed bolsters – supports callous - mean, cold, and unfeeling celestial - of the heavens; relating to heaven or to the sky consummate – perfect defraying - paying despicable – deserving to be despised or hated dissipated - dispersed, scattered effeminate – having characteristics that are attributed to women excursion - journey gewgaws – baubles, trinkets impropriety – an improper action or comment indigence – poverty myriad – an indefinite or incalculable number pertinently – appropriately prudence – cautiousness, sensibility repudiation – the act of disowning squalidness - the state of being dirty, nasty, or grubby due to neglect vexed - annoyed or agitated

1. What is Thoreau's opinion of the manner in which American people approach home ownership versus renting?

2. Thoreau asks, "Would the savage be wise to exchange his wigwam for a palace on these terms?" (Pg. 20) What do you think his answer might be?

Essay 1: Building the House (Pgs. 26-29)

Vocabulary

communicable — capable of being passed from one to another
compost — fertilizer that is created by the decay of organic matter
enterprise — project
hewing — cutting with an ax
impervious — incapable of being affected
mortised — cut so that another piece of wood may fit into it and create a joint (as in fitting
together logs to build a cabin)
posterity — all future generations
superstructure — something built on a base, such as a house with a foundation
tenoned — created a projecting piece of material, such as wood, to fit into a joint and create a
mortise
treacherously — with unfaithfulness or in violation of someone's trust

1. Why does Thoreau say, to a painter, that the most interesting dwellings are the homes of the common poor rather than great architectural feats? (Pg. 30)

Essay 1: Architecture (Pgs. 29-40)

Vocabulary

abstemiousness - the act of sparingly using food and drink

ado - fuss, trouble

afoot - in progress

beaux-arts - fine arts

behindhand - late or overdue

belles-lettres - literature that is created as art and not for the purpose of merely informing readers

cavillers - people who make objections for no important reason

chaff - debris removed when wheat is threshed; something worthless

circumspection - careful consideration of all consequences and circumstances

condensed - changed from vapor (gas) to liquid

cornice – a horizontal projection that caps the wall of a building

coveted - enviously desired

daubed - smeared

detriment - damage or injury

discomfiture - anything that causes a person to become upset or frustrated

earnestly - solemnly, gravely, or seriously

fluctuate - move up and down or back and forth

forsooth - indeed

grandeur - magnificence

hypocrisy - the false appearance of virtue

ignoble - not honorable

incurred - made liable for or subject to

inevitable - unavoidable

leaven – a substance, like yeast, that causes fermentation

metallurgy - the science of metals

pecuniary – monetary; relating to money

perceive – realize through use of the senses

picturesque – charming or quaint

preceding - coming before

ravaged – devastated; completely destroyed

rendered - made

transmigration – the passing at death from one body to another

unmerchantable - not worthy of selling

vagabond - a homeless, wandering person

vestal - chaste

wont - inclined or apt

1. Explain what Thoreau means by the following statement: "The student who secures his coveted leisure and retirement by systematically shirking any labor necessary to man obtains but an ignoble and unprofitable leisure, defrauding himself of the experience which alone can make leisure fruitful." (Pg. 33)

2. Explain Thoreau's philosophy on farming as expressed in his sentence, "I believe that [I did] better than any farmer in Concord did that year." (Pg. 36)

Essay 1: Bread, Furniture (Pg. 40-47)

Vocabulary

andirons – metal supports in a fireplace that hold up wood hominy – corn-like food shiftlessness – laziness

1. Why does Thoreau react harshly when his young acquaintance wants to live life as he does? (Pg. 46)

2. How does Thoreau obtain his furniture?

3. During the previous five years, how did Thoreau support himself?

Essay 1: Economy: Philanthropy (Pgs. 47-52)

Vocabulary

beggarly – inadequate; marked by poverty benevolence – kindness, charity carrion - dead and decaying flesh constitution - physical makeup contagion – a contagious disease crudity - rawness, lack of refinement dyspepsia – indigestion enumerating - counting firmament - the sky; the heavens hitherto – up until now intemperate - in a manner that shows lack of moderation, especially in drinking irrepressible – impossible to control microcosm - an individual or community which is a miniature world or a miniature universe nape – the back of the neck pedantic - like a person who is a showoff when it comes to his level of knowledge persevere – to continue on, despite all obstacles philanthropy - goodwill towards all people pious - devout trig - stylish trumpery - nonsense umbrageous - resentment causing wafted – moved as if by a breeze transitory – temporary

1. How does Thoreau feel about philanthropy, and why does he choose not to participate in it?

Essay 2: Where I Lived, and What I Lived For (Pgs. 53-64)

Vocabulary

cessation - end conventicle - a secret meeting, especially for the purposes of worship dilapidated - falling down; fallen into disrepair discern - distinguish discoursed - discussed exude - ooze freshet – an overflowing of a stream frittered - wasted illusory - deceptive lucid - easily understood oracles - divinely inspired revelations sentinels – guards servitor - a male servant sham - a pretense; feigning to deceive others somnolence - sleepiness or drowsiness spartan - spare, minimal sublime - superb succession - a series of things or people that follow one after the other sufficed - was sufficient supernumerary - surplus tinged - slightly colored transpire - happen unprofaned - pure

- 1. How do Thoreau's expectations of morning echo his expectations of life in general?
- 2. The crux of this book is explained in the following passage: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately,...and to see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." (Pg. 59) Why do you think Thoreau believes that living in nature is the only way to truly "live"?
- 3. List some of the allusions in this section and explain them.

Essay 3: Reading (Pgs. 64-72)

Vocabulary

cipher - calculate colloquies – formal conversations corrugations – forms created by ridges or grooves eloquence - a manner which shows great meaning or feeling emulate - imitate equable - uniform, even esoteric - secret flourishing – thriving goaded - urged lulls - soothes, calms metamorphose - to physically change from one form to another paltry - meager provender – food reservedly - in the manner of restraining words and actions rhetoric - the art of speaking or writing well statuary - statues or sculptures vain - unsuccessful

1. What, according to Thoreau, is the difference between the orator and the writer?

2. Thoreau shows a somewhat elitist attitude of intellectual snobbery in this passage when he describes how few of his fellow New Englanders read great works. From where do you think his arrogance and dismay come?

3. What does Thoreau regard as his utopia, or ideal world, with respect to reading and books?

Essay 4: Sounds (Pgs. 72-84)

Vocabulary

articulation - the act of stating something distinctly azure – blue causeway - a raised road over wet ground or water clangor - a resounding of metallic noise consolations - acts of comforting or offering solace disconsolate - hopelessly sad disposition - attitude toward life distended – swollen drovers - people who drive animals to market effectual - adequate ennui – boredom epochs - eras or ages festal - festive flag - falter or weaken heedlessly - without paying attention lading - cargo melancholy - depression or dejection melodious – pleasing to the ear obstinacy – stubbornness pastoral - relating to rural or country life paunches - potbellies pinnate - resembling a feather sagacity - shrewdness serene - calm strewn - scattered supersede - replace tethered - tied transgressions - sins unfrequented - seldom visited vale – valley vespers - evening stars withal - besides

1.	What does Thoreau mean when he says he has had the advantage of a simple life over
	those who have had to "look abroad" for amusement? (Pg. 73)

2. How does Thoreau feel about the railroad?

3. How does Thoreau's description of the various forest and country animals reflect his feelings about the natural world? (Pg. 81)

Essay 5: Solitude (Pgs. 84-90)

Vocabulary

congenial – agreeable
conspicuous – noticeable
imbibes – absorbs
misanthrope – someone who hates other people
panacea – a cure-all
passably – tolerably
prevailed – triumphed
remunerate – to pay the equivalent
repose – rest, relaxation
sanctify – to make holy
subtile – subtle
surety – certainty
wearisome – tiresome
wholesome – morally, physically, and mentally healthy

1. How does Thoreau feel about being alone?

2. How do you think Thoreau's understanding of loneliness differs from the commonly understood definition?

3. To what does Thoreau compare the morning air?

Essay 6: Visitors (Pgs. 90-100)

Vocabulary

alloy — a substance made from a mixture of metals beseechingly — imploringly, begging demigods — mythological beings that have more power than mortals, but less power than gods exempted — left out frugal — economical or thrifty loquacious — extremely talkative metaphysical — relating to the philosophical study of the causes of things and the nature of things mirth — gladness munitions — military equipment and weapons partook — took a portion of prevalence — widespread existence unkempt — rough, disheveled winnowed — removed by air current

1. What type of host does Thoreau seem to be to his guests?

2. What does Thoreau like about the Canadian woodchopper who visits him?

3. What is interesting about the way the Canadian answers questions?

4. How does Thoreau feel about most of his visitors?

Essay 7: The Bean Field (Pgs. 100-108)

Vocabulary

dobbin – a farm horse festoons - decorative chains which are hung between two points haughty - arrogant husbandry – the control of natural resources ineffable – indescribable iteration – repetition martial – relating to the army or to military life ministerial – government administration oratorios - lengthy choral works plodding - trudging potash - potassium which is used to help grow plants rigmarole - confusing talk sedulously - sincerely and diligently silicates - chemical salts sonorous - loud and deep in sound tremulous - timid tropes - figurative words or expressions

1. How does Thoreau feel about the physical labor of hoeing beans?

2. What analogy does Thoreau make to planting his bean seeds and working hard his first summer?

3. To what deeper philosophical questions does this analogy lead?

Essay 8: The Village (Pgs. 108-112)

Vocabulary

commodity – something that is highly valued invariably – without variation tempestuous – stormy victualling – supplying provisions of food voluptuous – sensuous

1. How does Thoreau regard getting lost in the woods?

2. How does he feel about the advertising in the village?

3. Was personal safety a concern in Thoreau's time, as it is today?

Essay 9: The Ponds (Pgs. 112-130)

sylvan – living in or located in a forest

transverse – lying across

zephyr - a gentle breeze

vitreous – glassy

Vocabulary abutted - bordered on ambrosial - relating to the food of greek or roman gods ascetic - practicing self-denial austere – stern, severe, or strict cerulean - blue congealed – became hard or thick contiguous - adjoining crystalline - clear and sparkling diverging – extending in different directions; branching off elicited - evoked encroachments - acts of gradually or sneakily taking over another person's land or rights equilibrium – the balance between two opposite forces fathomed – became able to understand fibrous - containing fiber fluviatile – living in a stream or river gossamer - something light and delicate gradations – steps, degrees, or stages in a series ichthyologists - scientists who study fish invert – turn upside down or inside out manifestly - obviously menagerie – a collection of animals motes - small particles mouldering – crumbling into small pieces nomenclature - name pellucid – transparent quicksilver – mercury redolent - fragrant or aromatic rushes – reeds scrutiny – analysis, careful examination selvage – the edge of woven fabric that is created to prevent raveling stratum – a layer subsistence – a means of existing only on the minimum food and clothing needed to stay alive surfeit - excess; overabundance sward – the grassy surface of land

Thoreau describes the color of water in a manner which is different from most peoples 1. perception. How does he describe it? Explain the extended metaphor Thoreau uses to describe Walden Pond. 2. 3. When Thoreau speaks of his days as a boy visiting Walden Pond, does he seem to regret his time there? Toward the end of his essay "The Ponds," Thoreau seems to become disgusted with humankind for something. What is it?

Essay 10: Baker Farm (Pgs. 130-136)

Vocabulary

derivative — coming from a known source; unoriginal eke — to gain with some effort gruel — a thin porridge hoary — ancient inquisitively — questioningly; with curiosity resplendent — shining brilliantly

1. After speaking to the Irish immigrant, what does Thoreau say about the immigrant's choice of work? How many people still behave like this Irishman today?

2. How does Thoreau compare the life of "ordinary" men to himself?

Essay 11: Higher Laws (Pgs. 136-144)

Vocabulary

fowling – hunting wild fowl intangible – incapable of being touched or held moiling – working hard omnipresent – present in all places at all times ornithology – the study of birds reproof – blame for a fault repugnance – strong dislike or distaste scullion – kitchen helper squeamish – nauseated tenure – a period of holding something wantonly – mercilessly

1. How does Thoreau describe his "higher law?"

2. What is the difference between English boys and the "Yankees"?

3. Thoreau uses a very interesting analogy of worms within a healthy person's body to describe the fallen nature of man. What does he say about the fallen nature of man?

4. What happens to John Farmer as he sits on his porch?

Essay 12: Brute Neighbors (Pgs. 144-153)

Vocabulary

carnage — slaughter
coeval — of the same age
denizens — inhabitants
derision — ridicule
dishabille — the state of being dressed in a casual or careless manner
harrowed — tormented
internecine — deadly
legions — multitudes
pertinacity — the act of being stubbornly persistent
pontificate — to give unwanted or arrogant opinions
precocious — early in development
resolutely — firmly determined
roiling — riling

1. Which "brute neighbors" are Thoreau's subject in this essay?

2. Of what is Thoreau speaking when he describes the battlefield? What literary term is used?

3. How does Thoreau feel about the various animals he observes in nature?

Essay 13: House-Warming (Pgs. 153-165)

Vocabulary

aborigines — members of the original culture of a land apex — peak cavernous — large and open coddling — pampering fresco — the art of painting on plaster indigenous — living naturally in a particular region opaque — not easily understood relinquished — gave up torpid — slow

1. What is Thoreau's view of being a houseguest?

2. What is Thoreau's view of working men, as mentioned when he describes the art of plastering?

3. What does Thoreau's description of the ice at the bottom of the pond suggest about his personality?

4. Why does Thoreau say that the value of wood is more universal than gold?

5. Do you agree with Thoreau's statement that "you can always see a face in the fire"? (Pg. 164)

Essay 14: Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors (Pgs. 165-175)

Vocabulary

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ardor – passion
carmine – a vivid shade of red
conjure – to summon by magic
dubious – questionable
fictile – related to pottery
jostled – pushed and shoved
obliterate – remove by covering over
orb – a spherical body
pinions – the end sections of birds' wings
sufferance – patience

1. Why does Thoreau spend time discussing the former inhabitants of Walden Pond?

2. How is Thoreau's human side shown in the story of finding a man whose family cabin had been burned in a prank?

3. As Thoreau finishes his section on former inhabitants, what conclusion can we draw about his feelings toward the people that have lived in Walden?

4. What does Thoreau mean when he says you cannot "deter a poet, for he is actuated by pure love"? (Pg. 171)

Essay 16: The Pond in Winter (Pgs. 182-193)

Vocabulary

aggregate – a mass
arbitrarily – by means of choosing at will
capacious – able to contain a lot
chasm – gorge
concurring – agreeing
conversant – having knowledge and experience in a particular field
cynosure – a center of attraction
infinitesimal – immeasurably small
promontory – a point of land jutting into the sea
putrid – rotten, vile
receded – moved back
transcendent – surpassing
undulated – waving
whimsical – erratic

1. Does Thoreau dispute William Gilpin's theory about Loch Fyne in Scotland?

2. How does Thoreau figure out mathematically the point that is most likely to be the deepest in the ponds surrounding him?

3. What does Thoreau mean when he asks, "Why is it that a bucket of water soon becomes putrid, but frozen remains sweet forever? It is commonly said that this is the difference between the affections and the intellect." (Pg. 192)

Essay 17: Spring (Pgs. 193-206)

Vocabulary

atoning - making amends befell - happened debauched - corrupted epitome – embodiment expeditious - acting with efficiency fetters – chains or shackles globule - a tiny ball of liquid hummock – a rounded mound of earth; a knoll imbricated – overlapped at the edges inert – powerless to move influx – a coming in oscillation – the act of swinging back and forth pirouetting – whirling around precursors - forerunners rectitude - virtue, morality resounded - reverberated rivulets - small streams stalactites - hanging mineral deposits in cave suppliant - a petitioner transient - short-lived tumult – uproar untenable - incapable of being held or maintained

- 1. What is Thoreau referring to when he writes about the "grotesque vegetation"? (Pg. 197)
- 2. What are some of the examples that Thoreau gives of the everyday metamorphoses that occur on a daily basis in front of our eyes?
- 3. What does Thoreau mean when he says that, "the Maker of this earth but patented a leaf"? (Pg. 199)
- 4. What would happen to village life if the woods around it ceased to exist?

Essay 18: Conclusion (Pgs. 206-216)

Vocabulary

cosmopolite – someone who lives in the city
ethereal – heavenly
ferule – a metal ring or cap around a piece of wood which prevents it from splitting
impressible – able to be marked or stamped upon
infernal – hellish
naturalized – became established as if a native
obsequious – subservient
scintillation – the act of sparkling or gleaming
tinder – kindling; a flammable substance used to start a fire
volatile – likely to change suddenly

- 1. What does Thoreau say about Mirabeau's defense of highway robbery that "honor and religion have never stood in the way of a well-conditioned and a firm resolve"? (Pg. 208)
- 2. Thoreau makes an interesting point when confronted with the opinion that ancient men were more intelligent than contemporary American men. He says that while this may be true, "a living dog is better than a dead lion." (Pg. 210) He goes on to say that people should try to be all that they can be, regardless of whether they can ever live up to the success of others who came before them. Do you agree?
- 3. Thoreau makes another important point: embrace your life, and do not wish you were richer, but make do with what you have. He says, "Most think they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable." (Pg. 212) Do you know any people like this? Would you agree with Thoreau on this point?
- 4. What does Thoreau say about the dinner party he attends where he goes away hungry?