

Henry David Thoreau's Walden
A look at ideas introduced in "Economy"

Walden - "Economy"

Names: Nicolette, Ying

Assigned pages: Pg 7-10

Choice #1:

"When he has obtained those things which are necessary to life, there is another alternative than to obtain the superfluities; and that is, to adventure on life now, his vacation from humbler toil having commenced. The soil, it appears, is suited to the seed, for it has sent its radicle downward, and it may now send its shoot upward also with confidence. Why had man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above?"

Choice #2:

"At the present day, and in this country, as I find by my own experience, a few implements, a knife, an axe, a spade, a wheelbarrow, &c., and for the studious, lamplight, stationery, and access to a few books, ranked next necessities, and can all be obtained at a trifling cost. Yet some, not wise, go to the other side of the globe, to barbarous and unhealthy regions, and devote themselves to trade for ten or twenty years, in order that they may live -- that is, keep comfortably warm, -- and die in New England at last."

Conclusion: From both of the quotes, Thoreau are talking about how people in the society always wanted to reach for higher and higher social class. Even when they got any things that's needed for life, they still wanted more than that.

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Names: Andrew Small & Charlie Kogan

Assigned pages: 10-13

Choice #1: Places where he talks more about himself and his beliefs

What Does Thoreau mean when he says "I too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, but I had not made it worth any one's while to buy them" (12). Does he mean that he had tried to please people earlier on but could not find what would give them any satisfaction? Therefore, he stopped caring what people had wanted, and gone off on his own, and did what was in his heart, rather than pleasing others.

Choice #2:

What Does Thoreau mean when he says "to anticipate, not the sunrise and the dawn merely, but, if possible, Nature Herself" (10). Is he trying to use nature to describe the way he thinks, His views in anticipation of all the different things he does, Like anticipating all of his business opportunities. What does this say about his views?

Conclusion:

Thoreau uses different analogies in order to express his thinking. His woven basket analogy can be considered his view on business along with his sunrise analogy. In these couple pages, it is clear that Thoreau has been showing his different views on business and the way it interferes with life.

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Names: Rachel and Emma

Assigned pages: 13-17

Choice #1: Emerson writes, "It is an interesting question how far men would retain their relative rank if they were divested of their clothes" (14). In this quote he is questioning whether people who have a high social status because of the clothes they wear, would have the same social status if they no longer wore wealthy clothes that distinguished them from others. I think this means that we should value people by their personality and who they are inside instead of by the clothes they wear that represent their wealth. What does Thoreau mean when he says, "It is an interesting question how far men would retain their relative rank if they were divested of their clothes?" Does he suggesting we should access someones social status by their personality and not their material wealth?

Choice #2: When it says, "While one thick garment is, for the most purpose, as good as three thin ones, and cheap clothings can be obtained at all prices really to suit customers" (15) Emerson is explaining how people do not need to buy nice and expensive clothing. He is saying that cheap clothing is directed towards wealthy people. He also states that there is no need for people to buy expensive things when you can get ones for equal value and less money. I think that this means that we as a whole should not be focused on the nice expensive things and be look for the same items (opportunities) for less cost. When does it mean when it states "While one thick garment is, for the most purpose, as good as three thin ones, and cheap clothings can be obtained at all prices really to suit customers." Is this explaining how people should not be caught up in the expensive and high end things because there is always another opportunity that will cost less? Does it suggest to look past what we want and focus on what we have?

Conclusion: Overall, Thoreau talks about the importance of clothing in our society to distinguish wealth between people. Throughout excerpt he talks about the different ways that social class is demonstrated and how it impacts lives. He emphasizes the idea that social status should be determined by your personality not your wealth and that we should be grateful for what we have.

Walden - "Economy"

Names: Alyssa Rosenbaum and Ashley Imyak

Assigned pages: 17-20

Choice #1: “Formerly, when how to get my living honestly, with freedom left for my proper pursuits, was a question which **vexed** me even more than it does now...” (18).

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, vexed means to feel annoyed or frustrated with someone or something. In this sentence, Thoreau is explaining that when he decided to move out to isolation, he realized that he would need a way to make money in order to get food and other necessary items. Thoreau said that this question “vexed” him, meaning that it aggravated him, since he knew that it would be challenging to make some sort of living while living on his own. Thoreau uses the word “vexed” to demonstrate that this question was on his mind for a while, and that he had to really think about it and figure out a solution to his problem. This adds to the chapter, which happens to be called “Economy” because Thoreau is figuring out all of the logistics of moving out to live in isolation, and Thoreau needs to make a living in order to live in isolation successfully.

Choice #2:

What does Thoreau mean when he says, “It would be well perhaps if we were to spend more of our days and nights without any obstruction between us and the celestial bodies, if the poet did not speak so much from under a roof, or the saint dwell there so long. Birds do not sing in caves, nor do doves cherish their innocence in dovecots”? Does he mean that people should explore their surroundings because not everything you are trying to accomplish will happen how you plan? Thoreau is suggesting that even though people are typically from one place and spend most of their time there, doesn’t mean that is where all of their success has to happen. For example, as Thoreau says, even though birds may spend time in caves, or poets inside, they still accomplish their goal outside, and not in their natural habitat.

Conclusion:

In this passage, Thoreau is talking about what he will need in order to survive, particularly a shelter. Although he does state that people have survived without a shelter, he feels that is necessary for him. He also talks about making money. Thoreau is talking about this here because after deciding that he wanted to live in isolation, he realized that he needed to think about what essential items he would need to survive. This shows that when someone has an idea, they need to think about how exactly they can follow through with that idea and must plan it out, and that is exactly what Thoreau is doing.

Walden - "Economy"

Names: Penelope and Elizabeth

Assigned pages: 20-23

Choice #1: Vocabulary

"It is possible to invent a house still more convenient and luxurious than we have, which yet all would admit that man could not afford to pay for" (23)

What is Thoreau trying to say here/what is the significance. Why would someone do this? Is it saying our mind could make an amazing house but we couldn't pay for? What point is he trying to make?

Choice #2: Points he makes about society

"Granted that the majority are able at last either to own or hire the modern house with all its improvements. While civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them. It has created palaces, but it was not so easy to create noblemen and kings. And if the civilized man's pursuit were no worthier than the savage's, if he is employed the greater part of his life in obtaining gross necessities and comforts merely, why should he have a better dwelling than the former?" (21-22)

He is saying how society is improving visually but people aren't. It shows how materialistic things are so important to society rather than the people in it. It also says how society is unfair with such a range from poverty to the rich and we are all the same so why does the rich get better treatment.

Conclusion:

Thoreau is explaining in these few pages what society is like. He talks about his neighbors and how different they are than himself. He talks about society's values these days and how they revolve around money and possessions to achieve happiness and success.

Walden - "Economy"

Names: Kevin Rosser and Kellen Scanlan

Assigned pages: 26-29

Choice #1: Lines you have questions about - ideas posed by Thoreau that can be interpreted in different ways.

What does Thoreau mean when he says, "We belong to the community"(29)? does he mean that whatever we act on, is influenced by the community? Does the community mean society? What defines a community for Thoreau?

Choice #2:

What does Thoreau mean when he says, "in those days, when my hands were much employed, I read but little, but the least scraps of paper which lay on the ground, my holder, or toothbrush, afforded me as much entertainment, in fact answered the same purpose as the Iliad."(29)? Does he mean that he was able to think clearly about his thoughts and the things around him without a voice from the outside world(society)?

Conclusion:

Much of this passage contained imagery of Thoreau's work on his house in the wild. He reflects on the state of mind that overcomes you when you are away from a busy and rushed life. With so much alone time, he starts to realize that even the smallest things, that he used to take for granted, provided him with entertainment. Thoreau references two lifestyles, with an emphasis on the simplicity of a life in the wild.

Names: Nir Z. and Nate Winer

Assigned pages: 29-32

Choice #1: Vocabulary

Cornice- an ornamental molding around the wall of a room just below the ceiling.

dilettantism - A dabbling in an art or a field of knowledge.

Choice #2: Lines expressed in a beautiful way.

“But a man has no more to do with the style of architecture of his house than a tortoise with that of it’s shell.” (page 30)

Conclusion:

This sum of pages mentions the architecture of man’s house and how it relates to his life. The meaning in these few pages is that where you live, is what you are which is referring to like if you are poor, you live in smaller house because you can’t afford much. Your area of living is like a form of identity.

Walden - "Economy"

Names: Billy A. Matt P.

Assigned pages: p. 32-35 (start with "I thus found")

Choice #1: *Many people see life in a way that doesn't focus enough on the small details*

While Thoreau is talking about the students at Cambridge College, he states that "Even the *poor* student studies and is taught only political economy, while that economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy is not even sincerely professed in our colleges"(33).

Thoreau I think is talking about how everyone studies at Cambridge even the *poor* student. He is only taught the political side of economy which could mean that the people there are only taught a certain view on life as a whole instead of the economy of the living which is a universal view of the world which isn't thoughtfully professed in their collages. Its the difference between two different societies the Cambridge society and the Everyday society, how differently they may think being taught two different ways the *Political Economy* and *The Economy of the Living* as well as how differently they may see life in general.

Choice #2: *Many people believe that success lies on their path, while success is only achieved by a few, perhaps lucky, individuals.*

Thoreau makes the controversial statement, that "Men have the indistinct notion that if they keep up this activity long enough, all will ride somewhere, in next to no time, and for nothing" (34).

Thoreau is writing at length of his metaphor of a "railroad [that] reached around the world". He makes this very interesting point This rationale strikes me as being very similar to the concept that, as children, in a junior sports team, for example, every kid gets some sort of award. For young children this makes sense because they should not be treated quite as full adults, but people need to realize that there is a line between making children feel good about their achievements and raising them to always expect praise for whatever work they did or did not do. Such is the reality of the world, that life is not fair, that there will always be winners and people that do better than you, that success be derived from talent, hard work or even luck, and that we humble humans have to accept that and do everything we can to carve out the best life that we can find for ourselves.

Conclusion: Thoreau's voice on these pages is a very cynical one. He is discussing in depth, and almost selfishly, the foolishness and ignorance of most men. He summarizes that most people are too caught up with themselves and their own potential and ignore the finesse of life as well as the potential that it has.

Walden - "Economy"

Names: Charles "King of Scientific/Mathematical Endeavor" Thompson, Evan Dreher

Assigned pages: 35-38 (stop before "By surveying")

Choice #1: Lines you consider to have important ideas - ones worth further discussion

"I am wont to think that men are not so much the keepers of herds as herds are keepers of men, the former are so much the freer." (36)

Implies that Thoreau is a believer in Emerson's "Societal Imprisonment" view of life, (Name created by Charles Thompson, not an official moniker for the viewpoint) and that animals are better off than us, purely because they are free, even when imprisoned, and actually tend to rule us, through their monetary value to our own societal function.

Walden - "Economy"

Names: Jack and Chloe

Assigned pages: 42-45

Choice #1: Thoreau's Thoughts on Furniture and Materialism

"Indeed, the more you have of such things the poorer you are." (43)

Choice #2: Thoreau's Thoughts on Materialism and Nature

"A lady once offered me a mat, but as I had no room to spare within the house, nor time to spare within or without to shake it, I declined it, preferring to wipe my feet on the sod before my door. It is best to avoid the beginnings of evil." (44)

How Thoreau talks about people in society

In this passage, Thoreau reflects on the idea of living as an individual alone in the woods. He discusses the effects of incorporating yourself with others, and isolation. He explains this when he says “the man who goes alone can start to-day; but he who travels with another must wait till that other is ready, and it may be a long time before they get off.” One of the negative aspects of relying on others is the delay that exists between the two. One will always be waiting on the other, because no two people have perfect unity. Thoreau argues that the only unity that someone has is with himself, ultimately promoting his decision of isolation. Ultimately, in this passage Thoreau explores the concept of someone’s need to be incorporated with others. He says that with incorporation comes other emotions such as greed, and that seclusion eliminates its presence. An individual can supply for itself, leaving time for their own efforts for self improvement. All of these things that come with solitude combined result in a kind of victory or success for that individual because it allows them to have control and exposes them to opportunities for self advancement.

Thoreau’s view on work in the woods

On page 45, Thoreau describes the way he viewed working while trying to save time for living in the woods. He says, “that by working six weeks in a year, I could meet all the expenses of living” here he shows that living in his own culture he created he does not need to do the normal view of work very often. He goes on to describe the toughness of trying to kept to the woods while working a job like working at a school. He said school was too expensive and that he “lost time in the bargain” explaining, “as i did not teach for the good of my fellow men, but simply for a livelihood, this was a failure”(45). Here Thoreau comments on the reasons people teach saying from his perspective of making a bit of money and for the others teachers this as the leading drive of their lives. He describes how many other types of business were either too time consuming or entirely take him away from his goals in the woods. He described berry picking as “ranging the hill all summer to pick the berries which came my way.” He called trade saying “I should probably be on my way to the devil.” Thoreau describes all of these jobs as something that hinders him from achieving his goals in the woods and some as a waste of time. By saying this he is arguing that when living in the woods many things in society that we think of as necessary for day to day life are optional in the woods.

Conclusion

In this passage, Thoreau discusses the ideas of working in the woods, and incorporating yourself with others among many other topics. He argues that the purpose behind work cannot be for financial support, but for the joy of accomplishing something. He also says that isolation leads to someone’s ability to be in control of their financial situation, and that it leaves time for focus on self development.