**EXCERPTS FROM THOREAU’S WRITINGS**

**Thoreau Excerpts**

**Chronology**

1837: Thoreau graduates from Harvard at twenty, comes home to Concord, and looks for a career. Probably begins a journal.

1838: Gives his first lecture before the Concord Lyceum, thus initiating a practice that was to have an important effect on his writing.

1839: With his brother John, embarks on a “fluvial excursion” along the Concord and Merrimack, and gather material for *The Week*.

1840 Makes his bow as a poet: the Transcendentalist *Dial* prints his lyric about Edmund Sewall.

1841 As handyman and friend, takes up residence with the Emersons. Is attracted to Linda Emerson.

1842 Publishes in eh *Dial* which carries nine of his best poems and his essay “Natural History of Massachusetts”

1843 Leaves Emerson’s home to act as a tutor to Emerson’s nephew at Staten Island and to try his luck with the New York literary market. More publications of essays and poems.

1845: Goes to live in a hut beside Walden Pond. Commences his period of greatest literary productivity.

1846 Travels to Main; gathers some of the material later to go into *The Maine Woods.*

1847. Ends Walden experiment; resumes residence at Emerson home.

1849: Thoreau’s first book, the *Week****,*** and most influential essay, “Civil Disobedience,” published.

1854 *Walden or Life in the Woods* published.

1857 Fight over slavery intensifies; Thoreau meets John Brown and is deeply impressed by him.

1860 More essays, including two on Brown are printed.

1862 Dies of tuberculosis on spring.

**Where I lived….**

By surveying, carpentry, and day-labor of various other kinds in the village in the meanwhile, for I have as many trades as fingers, I had earned $13.34. The expense of food for eight months, namely, from July 4th to March 1st, the time when these estimates were made —though I lived there more than two years—not counting potatoes, a little green corn, and some peas, which I had raised, nor considering the value of what was on hand at the last date was:

So I went on for some days cutting, and hewing timber, and also studs and rafters, all with my narrow axe, not having any communicable or scholar-like thoughts, singing to myself,

*Men say they know many things;*

*But lo! They have taken wings—*

*The arts and sciences,*

*And a thousand appliances;*

*The wind that blows*

*Is all that anybody knows*

**Thoreau on Solitude:**

This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my short sleeves, though it is coll as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whippoorwill is borne on the rippling wind over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lke, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The repose is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit, now roam the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature’s watchmen—links which connect the days of animated life….

**Thoreau on Economy:**

…I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle and framing tools; for these are more easily acquired than gotten rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field there were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? They have got to live a man’s life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and wood-lot! The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh.

But men labor under a mistake. The better part of the man is soon plunged into the soil for compost. By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal. It is a fool’s life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before…

…Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine. How can he remember will his ignorance—which is growth requires—who has so often to use his knowledge? We should feed and clothe him gratuitously sometimes, and recruit him with our cordials, before we judge of him. The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly.

Some of you, we all know, are poor, find it hard to live, are sometimes, as it were, gasping for breath. I have not doubt that some of you who read this book are unable to pay for all the dinners which you have actually eaten, or for the coats and shoes which are fast wearing or are already worn out, and have come to this page to spend borrowed or stolen time, robbing your creditors of an hour. It is very evident what mean and sneaking lives many of you live, for my sight has been whetted by experience; always on the limits, trying to get into business and trying to get out of debt, a vary ancient slough, called by the Latins *aes alienum*, another’s brass, for some of their coins were made of brass; still living and dying, and buried by this other’s brass; always promising to pay, promising to pay, tomorrow, and dying today, insolvent; seeking to curry favor, to get custom, by how many modes, only not state-prison offenses; lying, flattering, voting, contracting yourselves into a nutshell of civility, or dilating into an atmosphere of thin and vaporous generosity, that you may persuade your neighbor to let you make his shoes, or his hat, or his coat, or his carriage, or import his groceries for him; making yourselves sick, that you may lay up something against a sick day, something to be tucked away in an old chest, or in a stocking behind the plastering, or, more safely, in the brick bank; no matter where, no matter how much or how little.