

READING

Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau was a famous American essayist, poet, and practical philosopher. He was born on July 12, 1817, in Concord, Massachusetts. He was the third child of a small businessman John Thoreau and his wife, Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau.

Thoreau was a good student and he entered Harvard University in 1833. There he studied Greek and Latin as well as German. He graduated in 1837 and he started working as a teacher at his old grammar school. After two weeks, he resigned and started working for his father in the family pencil-making business. In 1838, he started a small school with the help of his brother John. The school collapsed three years later after his brother became ill.

After college, Thoreau became friends with Ralph Waldo Emerson, an older poet and essayist. Thoreau saw in Emerson not only a friend, but also a guide. For a time, Thoreau lived with Emerson as a caretaker for his home.

In the 1840s, Thoreau published poems and essays in *The Dial*, an American literary magazine. In 1840, he fell in love with an attractive visitor to Concord named Ellen Sewall. He offered to marry her and she accepted him, but her parents didn't like the idea and so they didn't get married.

In 1845, Thoreau built a small home for himself on Walden Pond. He was twenty-seven years old at the time. He ate mostly beans, wild fruit and wild vegetables. He spent his time taking care of his plants, watching animals, fishing, swimming, reading, writing and doing other activities. In 1854, he published a book about his activities called *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*.

During his life in Walden, Thoreau spent one night in prison because he didn't pay taxes. This experience made him write one of his most famous essays, *Civil Disobedience*. A famous quote from this work says: "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison." Thoreau was opposed to slavery and to Mexican-American War. He admired John Brown, a radical fighter against slavery.

In his later years, Thoreau was sick with tuberculosis. He died on May 6, 1862.

1 Read the text and answer the following questions.

- 1 Which university did Thoreau go to? _____
- 2 What did he study there? _____
- 3 Why didn't Thoreau marry Ellen Sewall? _____
- 4 What did Thoreau eat when he lived at Walden Pond? _____
- 5 What did Thoreau do when he lived at Walden Pond? _____
- 6 Why did Thoreau spend one night in prison? _____
- 7 Who did Henry David Thoreau admire? _____

2 Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 After finishing his university studies, Thoreau worked as a teacher for two years. _____
- 2 Thoreau's father had a pencil-making factory. _____
- 3 Henry David Thoreau was older than Ralph Waldo Emerson. _____
- 4 Thoreau lived for some time with Ralph Waldo Emerson. _____
- 5 Thoreau published poems and essays in a magazine called *The Dial*. _____
- 6 Thoreau wrote a book about his life at Walden Pond. _____
- 7 Henry David Thoreau was against slavery. _____

KEY

1 Read the text and answer the following questions.

- 1 Which university did Thoreau go to? **he went to Harvard**
- 2 What did he study there? **Greek, Latin, and German**
- 3 Why didn't Thoreau marry Ellen Sewall? **because her parents didn't want them to get married**
- 4 What did Thoreau eat when he lived at Walden Pond? **beans, wild fruit, and wild vegetables**
- 5 What did Thoreau do when he lived at Walden Pond? **he took care of his plants, watched animals, fished, swam, read, wrote, and did other activities**
- 6 Why did Thoreau spend one night in prison? **because he didn't pay taxes**
- 7 Who did Henry David Thoreau admire? **John Brown, a radical fighter against slavery**

2 Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 After finishing his university studies, Thoreau worked as a teacher for two years. **F (he worked as a teacher for two weeks)**
- 2 Thoreau's father had a pencil-making factory. **T**
- 3 Henry David Thoreau was older than Ralph Waldo Emerson. **F**
- 4 Thoreau lived for some time with Ralph Waldo Emerson. **T**
- 5 Thoreau published poems and essays in a magazine called *The Dial*. **T**
- 6 Thoreau wrote a book about his life at Walden Pond. **T**
- 7 Henry David Thoreau was against slavery. **T**