



## Chapter One: Economy

6/15/24

I wonder if Thoreau's claim that a simplified life is better for the mind and body is true. After all, Thoreau will live all alone, away from civilization, in the wilderness. No one will be near enough to help him if he gets attacked or robbed. Also, Thoreau has lived a 'civilized life' forever. He has no idea how to survive by himself in the wilderness. Furthermore, he has no idea what solitude will do to his mind. People have gone crazy from the lack of human interaction. I disagree that people are tied down to their labor to gain alleged necessities. There is nothing wrong with trying to improve your trade to assume greater comforts in life. Thoreau's four alleged necessities, food, shelter, clothing, and fuel, ignore the people's need for joy. Just because you only need those four things to live doesn't mean your life will be enjoyable. However, I understand that by letting go of excessive things a person will be less worried and stressed, as Thoreau states. If we were to not worry about how nice our houses or clothes were, we would have the ability to look inward and improve ourselves as a person.

I was confused by Thoreau's desire not to be indebted to anyone as he built his house at Walden Pond. But I do appreciate, however, that he started with nothing to make the house. This shows that he is committed to his experiment, and I do appreciate that about him. Thoreau comes off as very determined and focused in this chapter, and I am excited to see what more he has to say about his adventures as I further read *Walden*. I hope Thoreau's experiment is a success, and he comes to the conclusion that he is hoping to reach.

## Chapter Two: Where I Lived and What I Lived For

6/20/24

Thoreau's ability to see the beauty in his unconventional home is admirable, as he shows his readers that you do not need a beautiful home with beautiful things to be happy. Materialism and consumerism have become big in our generation, with fast fashion taking over. And while there is nothing wrong with wanting nice things, when we put so much emphasis on them, we lose the true beauty that items hold. Thoreau loves his home and his decorations because he spent the time to make them. He feels pride that he was able to do so, and therefore sees his house as perfect. This reminds me of how I do Christmas presents. For Christmas every year, I make ornaments for my family. When I was younger they weren't outstanding, but I have progressed throughout the years. I feel a lot of pride in all of my ornaments, even the 'uglier ones' from when I was younger. Each ornament had a significant amount of time and effort put into each one. I don't think less of the older ones, but rather I cherish them because of the sentimental value they have to me. I feel that people would be a lot happier if they focused on having a meaningful home over a pretty one.

## Chapter Three: Reading

6/23/24

From this chapter, it is clear that Thoreau places a heavy value on quality education, and it clearly shows that he believes everyone should always try to achieve greater knowledge and intellect by challenging themselves through reading. I agree that reading at increasingly higher levels greatly benefits the brain's strength. However, I disagree with Thoreau's opinions on lighter books made for education. While it is important for someone focusing on their education to read books rich with intellect and ideas, the average person, especially in the 1800's, has very little use for reading outside of the basic ability. Reading light-hearted books for entertainment or fun won't improve your intelligence, but it will benefit the mind by enhancing one's morale and overall happiness in life. I admire Thoreau's commitment to education, but I find his close-mindedness towards his views of it disappointing.

## Chapter Four: Sounds

6/28/24

This chapter is my current favorite as I feel deeply connected to Thoreau's description of the sounds around him and the serenity he can convey through his writing. Something about the sounds of nature always brings me a sense of calm. I find I am at my best headspace away from technology, where I can focus on nothing but the sounds of the birds and animals around me. I noticed when reading that Thoreau's tranquility in nature was interrupted by the "scream" of the Railroad and the trains. I know from prior knowledge that Thoreau is a transcendentalist, and therefore rejects the industrial revolution. In this chapter, I learned it is due to his belief that new technology interrupts civilization's connection with nature. This is something still relevant in our generation. I find that our society is in such a rush to discover and invent new things that we slowly lose connection with our planet and the simplicity of our world. This doesn't mean that industrialization is a bad, as we have achieved great things and can discover more about our world. However, it shows the deep impact the changes in Thoreau's time had and still has in our lives.

## Chapter Five: Solitude

7/2/24

I could never spend so much time away from people as I love the constant exchange of ideas and also the joy of being with people, but I have always been interested in the benefits solitude can have on a person. A person I knew once attended a solitude retreat where she didn't talk or interact with anyone for two weeks. In these two weeks, she said that she could focus more on herself and her feelings, rather than worrying about the world around her. She states she was the most relaxed she has ever been after the two weeks and could have done it for another two weeks. I think my friend's experience is very similar to Thoreau's. By isolating himself from the drama of civilization he can fully enjoy the nature around him, and I think he finds peace in this. I wonder what it was like for Thoreau once his experiment was over and he returned to Concord. I can't imagine he will be able to fully assimilate back into the world after experiencing the peace that solitude can provide.

## Chapter Six: Visitors

7/5/24

I enjoyed reading about Thoreau's parties, especially as he contrasts them to the parties that he used to attend when he lived in the town. I like that he focuses more on providing spiritual knowledge to his visitors, whereas others try to show off their food and house. By giving up such things when Thoreau moved to Walden Pond, I feel he can no longer focus on physical possessions, allowing him to fully commit to what he values most: knowledge and learning. I noticed the contrast between the men and the children living in the woods in this book. The men seem to be focused on their lives, whereas the children seem to enjoy the woods with a carefree curiosity. I think this shows how as we mature and grow up, we can get caught up in our lives and lose our child-like innocence and worldview. By isolating himself, Thoreau seems to be able to appreciate the world for what it is. It is a shame that more people can not afford or cannot slow down and just live in the moment away from the craziness of rural life.

## Chapter Seven: The Bean Field

7/8/24

Thoreau doesn't garden for the sake of turning profit, rather he finds peace. This contrasts the farmers he has talked about in previous chapters, as Thoreau stays true to himself and focuses on his connection with nature. I like that Thoreau learned how to cultivate beans through trial and error. This connects back to previous chapters in which he talks about building his house as Thoreau doesn't claim to be an expert in farming, just like he didn't claim to be an expert in building houses. Rather he finds joy in the effort of trying. I find this to be very admirable. The best way to learn and improve is to make mistakes, acknowledge them, and correct them. While farming may not be an intellectual endeavor, Thoreau's approach shows how much he values having the ability of critical thinking and independent thought.



## Chapter Eight: The Village

7/11/24

When I originally read that Thoreau was arrested for tax evasion I thought that Thoreau was a little pretentious. After all, he does use the roads and other facilities that the townspeople do, so it seems rather unfair that he wouldn't pay taxes when the other people of Concord presumably do. However, I did some research on the time period and found out that Thoreau committed tax evasion due to his disdain for the racist values promoted by the U.S. government in the 1850's. During a land dispute, the U.S. forces crossed over into Mexican territory, which caused the Mexican army to attack them. This was done intentionally by President Polk so he could lie to Congress that the Mexicans attacked them on American soil; he would famously say "American blood on American soil". America would declare war on Mexico, leading to the Mexican-American war. Many Republicans of the time would argue Polk's claims: Lincoln would go on to write his famous Spot Resolution, where he challenged the spot of the battle. Thoreau's refusal to fund the army attacking the Mexicans is an admirable cause, and I applaud his efforts to stay true to his beliefs. Thoreau was also an abolitionist, a group who wanted to abolish slavery, and also refused to pay taxes due to the legalization of slavery. Thoreau's use of 'civil disobedience' to protest would inspire many historical figures after him including Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

## Chapter Eleven: Higher Laws

7/12/24

I find Thoreau's efforts to improve himself admirable and inspiring. We can only be as healthy and strong as we allow ourselves to be. However, I also find Thoreau's efforts mentioned here to be a bit extreme, especially avoiding the consumption of alcohol, tea, and coffee, and attempting to convert to vegetarianism. While products such as alcohol, tea, coffee, and meat can be unhealthy, it is fine to consume these products in moderation. A lot of people in our century consume coffee in the morning as a way to wake up. While some people can overdo this, I find nothing wrong with enjoying a cup of coffee if it makes your day more enjoyable. It's the same with alcohol. People can become alcoholics if they consume a considerable amount. However, there is nothing wrong with enjoying a drink with your friends, if you're over twenty-one, now and then. Meat can cause type two diabetes and other diseases, but humans need the proteins found in meat to survive. Meat can also be delicious and is part of many people's cultures. So while Thoreau should give up what he mentions in this chapter if he finds that he needs to, it is safe to continue to use these products. If using them, in a healthy moderation, makes someone happy, they should continue to. Life is way too short to worry too much about what we consume. People should allow themselves to have fun, as long as it isn't overdone.

## Chapter Twelve: Brute Neighbors

7/15/24

I find it interesting that Thoreau wants to live freely in nature even after all the ugliness of it that he describes in this chapter. A lot of people value security in their lives. Thoreau, however, seems to be ready to face the potential of death if it means he can find himself within nature. This is something that I have deep respect for. I would be way too scared to go and live in nature like Thoreau, especially after he described the state of his house in previous chapters. So while people can argue with Thoreau's morals and wisdom, no one can argue that he is very brave to follow through with his beliefs. In this chapter, I love Thoreau's enthusiasm towards the ant battle, as I found it funny. However, his enthusiasm shows how deeply Thoreau respects nature, as he compares the ants to human warriors. It can be concluded, therefore, that Thoreau values the nuances of nature, rather than the events happening in the human world around him.

## Chapter Thirteen: House-Warming

7/18/24

In this chapter, Thoreau recounts his dismay that nature is being used for commercial use, and while I understand why he would be upset about it, the industrialization of America was important and therefore worth the effect it had on nature. Industrialization improved the lives of many people. Greater access to food would lead to a spike in the life expectancy of its citizens. Also, factories would lead to the creation of the middle class, who would be at the forefront of politics supporting internal improvements, temperance, and public education. The middle class, who used to be poor, now had enough money to live comfortably and could enjoy entertainment and other luxuries in life. Eventually, factory workers formed Unions, decreasing mistreatment and drastically improving their lives. Immigrants struggling to survive in their countries would come to the U.S. for a better life. Thoreau grew up rich and never got to experience what it was like for those people during the Industrial Revolution, so I can understand why he is so focused on the effect commercialism had on nature. In this chapter, Thoreau mentions that humans wouldn't survive another ice age, but with the rapid expansion of technology, I would argue that humanity has never been more prepared. In fact, if an ice age were to occur I think that Thoreau would be in the most trouble, as he has very little protection against nature.

## Chapter Sixteen: The Pond in Winter\

7/22/24

Thoreau's point that people always wish to believe in a symbol of heaven has always been true. For as long as humanity has been alive, people have turned to religion as a way to explain the world around them. I think this stems from the natural human desire to fully understand the unknown. While back before the common era this meant creating stories to explain natural phenomena, today we have strayed away from religion to exploring our universe. While much of this proves useful, most of the discoveries are made for curiosity. Most of what we learn about space isn't even close to applicable to anything here on Earth, yet we still ponder about it. Thoreau measuring the lake shows his intellect, and how he questions the common belief. I applaud him for taking the step to prove the truth about the world, rather than just theorize about it.

When the workers hauled off the ice, I wonder why Thoreau didn't stop them. Walden Pond meant a lot to him, and he enjoyed looking at the ice. This might have to do with his non-confrontational character, or he might have felt that he was powerless to do anything.

## Chapter Seventeen: Spring

8/3/24

This chapter was so melancholy and sweet. I loved the message about renewing yourself as the world renews. It feels very similar to our tradition of "New Year new me". Thoreau, however, will probably stick to his renewed self. I loved the peacefulness within the chapter as Thoreau describes the return of animals. Spring has always been my favorite holiday due to the world's beauty during it. I think after a long winter, seeing beauty again shocks our systems, adding to the effect of spring on humanity. This chapter was also sad for me as this is the end of Thoreau's experiment. During this time it feels that Thoreau found himself. I'm sad that he couldn't continue living the life that he enjoyed. Everyone could learn from Thoreau. We don't have to be tied down to a certain lifestyle. We all have the ability to change ourselves and our environment for the better.

## Chapter Eighteen: Conclusion

8/5/24

I love that Thoreau ended by saying that he has other lives to live. It shows that even though his experiment is over, he still is dedicating himself to finding out how to live, as he did in *Walden*. I love his message about selling our fancy clothes and getting rid of our civilized selves. Thoreau wants us to discover who we truly are, just like he did at Walden Pond. However, we cannot do that if we are constantly focused on the superficial nature of the world around us. Civilization must seem strange to Thoreau, so I wonder if he plans on returning to it. He states that he will go live more lives, and I wonder if he will take on another drastic lifestyle. I know he will go on to write not only *Walden* but also transcendental articles in the dial, and he would become an avid abolitionist, helping smuggle people through the Underground Railroad. *Walden* and Henry David Thoreau is an inspiration to all of us, as he teaches us not to be tied down by the lifestyle we feel we must live.

“Conversation: The Legacy of Henry David Thoreau

Crispin Sartwell) 8/11/24: One thing I was disappointed about when I read *Walden* was that Thoreau never talked about any of the struggles he had running his experiment. I don't think this is due to him not having any struggles because it is unreasonable to assume that in two years and two months his experiment ran exactly the way he wanted it to. That's why I loved that Sartwell talked about his dwindling money supply and how that affected their van life. They had to become a lab guinea pig in order to survive; They describe this experience as painful and unpleasant. Thoreau's experiment ran so smoothly because he had the money to fund it; He could afford to figure things out and make mistakes. Sartwell chose this lifestyle to try and lower his expenses down to what he could afford, while Thoreau was trying to see if it would lead to a happier life. Sartwell portrays the truth about what it would be like to try and live that minimalist life. I like that Sartwell acknowledges that his and Thoreau's experience was different, as it shows that they understand the implications of completely moving away from civilization. However, since Sartwell made such a change to their life, Sartwell stays true to Thoreau's teachings and proves that the minimalist life, while hard, is certainly possible.

Ken Ilgunas) 8/12/24: Ilgunas almost perfectly embodies Thoreau. For starters, he is civilly protesting the cost of tuition for colleges by living in his van on campus. This is uncanny to Thoreau evading taxes to protest the Mexican-American civil war. Ilgunas is being peaceful in his protest and refusing to pay for a dorm or boarding in order to save money, and Thoreau refused to help fund the war that he was against. I really liked Ilgunas's ending views on Thoreau. One doesn't need to completely withdraw themselves from society, Thoreau certainly didn't. He still had visitors and went into town periodically. Thoreau's experiment also came to end after the two years and two months were up. Ilgunas viewed this as a chapter of his life, and when it came to the end he moved onto his next home. Thoreau also knew that *Walden Pond* was only one life he would live, and he even acknowledged this in chapter eighteen of



*Walden*. The important thing is to be able to find sanctuary where you need it. Both Thoreau and Ilgunas lived their minimalist lives and returned back to civilization, armed with the knowledge that they gained from their experiences.

William Powers) 8/13/24: I disagree that Thoreau escaped from society. He isolated himself from civilization, but not because he was running away from society itself. In fact, Thoreau would interact daily with society. He himself stated that he had more visitors than when he lived in Concord. He had many people he saw on a daily basis, all of which he talked to. Just because his society wasn't big or traditional doesn't mean that it wasn't one. Thoreau also wasn't escaping from anything. Escaping implies that he was running away to never return. Rather, Thoreau was opening himself up to a new world to expand his mind and understanding of the world. Thoreau would return back to civilization after a few years, and he didn't do this sadly. He knew that Walden Pond was a temporary home, one in which he could use to further his understanding of minimalist life and its benefits. If Thoreau was escaping, he would have shied away from civilization, probably never to return. I think this type of view point shows Thoreau as a hermit who feared industrialization and community. However, Thoreau was an intellect who saw the importance of nature and was eager to prove it. He would return back to civilization to face this problem head on. He was a writer in *The Dial*, an important transcendentalist news paper, and would publish many articles. Thoreau didn't escape from anything, he was trying to correct all of society as he saw necessary.