

English 10 *Into the Wild* Assignment

Directions: You may choose to work with other students or individually for this assignment. Below is an outline of information about the philosophy of Transcendentalism and several famous transcendentalists. Remember; Transcendentalism is a philosophy of living, writing, and being that Emerson and Thoreau made popular. It is part of the American psyche. Chris McCandless embodies many of the Transcendentalist characteristics established in the writings of both Emerson and Thoreau. For each statement of information about Emerson or Thoreau on the outline, you must provide an example from *Into the Wild* to support that statement or provide a reason why that characteristic does NOT describe Chris McCandless. Your examples should be SPECIFIC and INCLUDE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE, not vague generalizations. Include page numbers with your examples. Examples need not be word for word from the book. Summaries are okay. Please follow the model I have included for you. This is due at the end of the hour. Each student will complete his/her OWN chart, but working together and having similar answers is perfectly acceptable. (If you do not finish, just turn in what you have.)

The Transcendentalists (1840–1855)

- 1) Transcendentalism: stressed individualism, intuition, relationship to nature, self-reliance
- 2) Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1885)
 - a. His writings helped establish the philosophy of individualism, an idea still deeply imbedded in American Culture
 - b. “Nature”
 - i. When in nature the ego vanishes
 - ii. Feels connection with Universal Being (all the world is connected/one)
 - iii. Once experienced nature through experience, now only through intellect
 - iv. Individuals must form their own relationship with nature to understand it and themselves
 - c. “Self-Reliance”
 - i. Trust instincts; don’t conform to society’s expectations
 - ii. People should not be afraid to change their minds or be misunderstood; great figures from history started out being misunderstood
 - iii. People who cling to conformity will not be remembered for their ideas
- 3) Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)
 - a. Resisted materialism; chose simplicity and individualism
 - b. Most “out there” extreme of the Transcendentalists
 - c. “Walden”
 - i. Lived on Walden Pond for 2+ years

- ii. Wrote it as a guidebook for life, showing how to live wisely in a world designed to make wise living impossible
- iii. Urges readers to simplify their lives; people are in too great a hurry and lose touch with themselves
- iv. Poverty, Solitude and Weakness only exist when people are too busy to follow their dreams and instincts
- v. Living more meaningful lives involves resisting conformity and tradition
- vi. Left because he had many more lives to lead; he acknowledges that people learn different lessons from different experiences

Fill in the answers on this page or transfer them to another sheet of paper.

The Transcendentalists (1840–1855)

- 1) Transcendentalism: stressed individualism, intuition, relationship to nature, self-reliance
- 2) Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1885)
 - a. His writings helped establish the philosophy of individualism, an idea still deeply imbedded in American Culture Even in college, Chris chose to live like an individual. He lived differently from his fellow classmates – he lived alone in a simple apartment with very few amenities.

“Nature”

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- ii. Feels connection with Universal Being (all the world is connected/one)

- iii. Once experienced nature through experience, now only through intellect

- iv. Individuals must form their own relationship with nature to understand it and themselves

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- i. Trust instincts; don’t conform to society’s expectations

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