

WALDEN PACKET

ENGLISH 11H

1. EVALUATE: Critics claim that Thoreau's personal success in the woods depends largely on his wealth, privilege, and stage in life. In other words, he lived in the woods because he could, whereas larger portions of society would have considered his social experiment a luxury they could not afford. Does this make Thoreau's message arrogant and ignorant? Does it prevent his message from reaching a broader audience? Or, is his message so universal that it transcends boundaries of socio-economic status?

2. RHETORICAL DEVICES: How is Thoreau's writing *didactic*? What effect does it have?

adjective di-dac-tic \dī-'dak-tik, də-\

: designed or intended to teach

: intended to convey instruction and information

: making moral observations

: can have a negative connotation because it construed as being preachy

3. RHETORICAL DEVICES: Read the following list of quotes from *Walden*. Thoreau is known for his many aphorism. What effect do they have? Aphorism: a short phrase that expresses a true or wise principle

- I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.
- Our life is frittered away by detail... Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!
- Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.
- 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.
- One piece of good sense would be more memorable than a monument as high as the moon.
- The universe is wider than our views of it.
- Be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought.
- If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.
- There is an incessant influx of novelty into the world, and yet we tolerate incredible dullness.
- The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.
- Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains.
- I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.
- Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our business.
- We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones.

4. What is the overall effect of Thoreau's use of aphorisms?

5. Choose one of the above quotes. Write your own interpretation and commentary of Thoreau's message.