# Primary Sources: Thoreau's Walden Pond, Why He Left the Woods

Henry David Thoreau

Grade Level **1372**

*Editor's Note: Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was an American author, poet and philosopher. He was one of the major figures of the Transcendentalism movement. Transcendentalists believed that all mankind is good and felt a strong connection with nature. Most were against slavery and were for women's rights. The text below is taken from Thoreau's most famous book, "Walden," which was published in 1854. It is about his two years spent living in the wilderness near Walden Pond in Massachusetts. This section is from Chapter 18: Conclusion.*

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear, that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now.

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that 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. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

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*Lexile 980*

**"More Lives Left To Live"**

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. It seemed to me that I had more lives left to live and could not spare any more time for this one type of life in the woods. It is remarkable how easily and mindlessly we fall into a particular habit, and create a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond. The surface of the earth is soft, and it is easy for the feet of men to make an impression on it. How worn and dusty, then, must be the roads of the world, how deep the footprints of habit! I did not wish to make a habit of my cabin life. If I were traveling by ship, I would not stay in the cabin below the deck for the whole trip, but would want to be on the deck, where I could better see the moonlight on the mountains.

Living in the woods, I learned this: that if one follows his dreams, and tries to live the life he has imagined for himself, he will meet with success. He will find new laws to live by or he will improve the old laws by living a better life. As he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will seem less complicated. When he is alone he will not feel lonely, when he is poor he will not feel poor, and even if he is weak, he will not feel weak. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.