

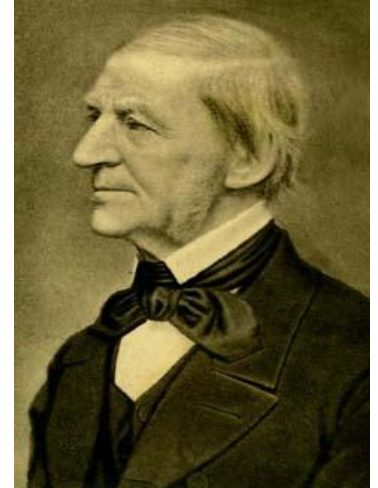
Ralph Waldo Emerson: Nature Notes



Biography (1803-1882)

"Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you."

- Emerson was the "father" and leading spokesman of Transcendentalism.
- He worked as a minister (though he resigned as an act of conscience), a writer of essays, and a poet. He also delivered lectures across much of the nation.
- Was known as the Sage of Concord.
- The development of Transcendentalism is often traced to his 1836 essay, "Nature."
- He is best known for his belief in human potential, education, and self-reliance.
- Emerson strongly believed in literary independence for the United States, arguing that it was time for Americans to create a writing style that was independent from Europe. Following a lecture by Emerson in 1837, Oliver Wendell Holmes argued that Emerson had delivered "America's Intellectual Declaration of Independence."
- He founded the Transcendental Club in 1836



Nature (1836)

"To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food."

- Emerson emphasizes the importance of solitude, arguing that society tends to corrupt humans, altering our perspective on what matters.
- He argued that one should approach nature deliberately, repeating the experience and reflecting on what one encounters.
- He argued that the size of nature and the universe (using the stars as a symbol, for example) dwarf the problems that we allow to overpower us. When placed in the context of the scope, beauty, and distance seen in the stars, one cannot become overwhelmed by her cares.
- Nature is owned by no one, though some lay claim to parts of the land.
- Few appreciate the majesty nature. We must move beyond simple appreciation.
- Nature rejuvenates humans. In the encounter with nature, one can shed his cares like a snake sloughs off its skin, emerging new, with the old troubles cast aside.
- Nature alone is not enough to restore humans, though. It is only when there is an interaction between nature and a willing human soul that restoration takes place.
- The work as a whole emphasizes the unity of God, nature, and man. This unity creates the Oversoul that Emerson discusses so often in his writing.