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American Studies English 11

Transcendentalism

Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Self-Reliance”

Background Notes on Emerson:

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| Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1805) was a poet, essayist, and lecturer who is known as the voice of Transcendentalism.  After his wife’s death, he settled in Concord, Massachusetts and devoted himself to the study of philosophy, literature, and  religion. His work *Nature* emphasizes self-reliance and individuality. The text is considered to be the unofficial manifesto  of the Transcendentalists. |

Reading Questions (Homework):

1. How does Emerson feel about envy and imitation?
2. What does Emerson believe that people must do to receive their share of the world’s goodness – “their nourishing corn” (4)?
3. According to Emerson, why should people trust themselves?
4. According to Emerson, why are people afraid of being inconsistent?
5. What kinds of people think that inconsistency is important?
6. What kinds of people are not afraid to be inconsistent?
7. Which elements of this work reflect the tenets of Transcendentalism?

Aphorisms: **(Do not complete for homework; this is classwork)**

An aphorism is a brief statement, usually one sentence long that expresses a general principle or truth about life. Benjamin Franklin’s “Honesty is the best policy” is one example of an aphorism. Identify aphorisms, list them on the chart below, and explain how they reflect Emerson’s Transcendentalist ideals.

Aphorism Paraphrase Transcendentalist Ideals Relevant Example/Likely Scenario

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