**ELEMENTS OF TRANCENDENTALISM**

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s motto was “Trust thyself.” This principle lies at the heart of transcendentalism, an intellectual movement that emphasized the dignity of the individual and advocated a simple, mindful life. The transcendentalists wanted to transcend (go beyond) the limitations of the senses and everyday experience. Key tenets of transcendentalism include:

• a theory that “transcendent forms” of truth exist beyond reason and experience; every individual is capable of discovering this truth on his or her own, through intuition

• a conviction that people are inherently good and should follow their own beliefs, however controversial they may be

• a belief that humankind, nature, and God are all interconnected

As you read, consider how Emerson’s writing articulates his belief in the importance of the individual as well as his ideas about humankind’s relationship to the natural world.

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| **Element of Transcendentalism** | **Example from the Text** |
| Every individual is capable of discovering this truth on his or her own, through intuition |  |
| People are inherently  good and should follow their own  beliefs, however controversial these may be. |  |
| Humankind,  nature, and God are all interconnected |  |

**The Art of the Essay P. 366**

When you write an essay for class, you are taking part in a literary tradition that goes back hundreds of years. In classroom writing, the essay may have many rules governing its structure and topic, but in the literary world, essays come in all shapes and sizes, accommodate any topic, and can be found in books, magazines, and newspapers.

Formal Essay: Informal Essay:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Essay** | Define: | Characteristics: |
| **Emerson** | How did Emerson use essays? | Why did Emerson write essays? |
| **Elements of an essay:** | **Define** | **What is its role in the essay?** |
| Organization |  |  |
| Supporting details |  |  |
| Diction |  |  |
| Tone |  |  |

“Nature”

1. What are three ways the woods can transform a man, according to Emerson in Nature?
2. In Nature, Emerson discusses the “delight” the natural world often inspires. What does Emerson think this power to delight comes from?
3. What does Emerson mean by the statement “Nature always wears the colors of the spirit” (25)? How does this idea affect the meaning of the preceding description of Emerson’s experience crossing the common?
4. Look at the themes you recorded for each of Emerson’s writing. How does each theme relate to the ideals of transcendentalism?
5. How are the themes found in “Nature” similar to those from Bryant’s “Thanatopsis”?
6. Find an example of a simile and explain its effect.
7. Find a hyperbole and explain its effect.
8. What does Emerson say about his relationship with God?
9. Does Emerson prefer living in nature to living in a city or town? Use textual citation to support your answer.

“Self-Reliance”

SOAPTONE this piece

S-Subject

O-Occasion

A-Audience

P-Purpose

Tone- Author’s attitude

1. Why does Emerson see society as the enemy of individuality?
2. What is the role of nonconformity? What did that word mean to Emerson?
3. How is trust a part of being self reliant?