Quotes from Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

**Reading and Writing Task:** In a group, take several minutes to carefully read aloud the following quotes. Check any that you feel strongly embody an aspect of Naturalism. Select three quotes and write them on a piece of writing paper, along with a personal reflection (at least two or three sentences each). You can (A) journal on a personal experience you have had which connects with Thoreau’s lesson, (B) explain how Thoreau’s beliefs still apply to the modern age, or (C) make an in-depth inference from the quote, taking its lesson further.

Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!
from the chapter "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" in *Walden*

As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.
from the chapter “Economy” in *Walden*

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
from the "Conclusion" to *Walden*

Though I am old enough to have discovered that the dreams of youth are not to be realized in this state of existence yet I think it would be the next greatest happiness always to be allowed to look under the eyelids of time and contemplate the perfect steadily with the clear understanding that I do not attain to it.
from the *Journal* (October 24, 1843)

I had three pieces of limestone on my desk, but I was terrified to find that they required to be dusted daily, when the furniture of my mind was all undusted still, and threw them out the window in disgust.
from the chapter "Economy" in *Walden*
To be awake is to be alive.
from the chapter "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" in Walden

Soon the ice will melt, and the blackbirds sing along the river which he frequented, as pleasantly as ever.
The same everlasting serenity will appear in this face of God, and we will not be sorrowful, if he is not.
from a letter to Lucy Brown dated March 2, 1842, following the death of Thoreau's brother

My Aunt Maria asked me to read the life of Dr. Chalmers, which, however, I did not promise to do.
Yesterday, Sunday, she was heard through the partition shouting to my Aunt Jane, who is deaf, "Think of it! He stood half an hour today to hear the frogs croak, and he wouldn't read the life of Chalmers."
from the Journal (March 28, 1853)

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.
from the "Conclusion" to Walden

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.
from the "Conclusion" to Walden

Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk.
from the Journal (c. November 11-14, 1850)

The frontiers are not east or west, north or south, but wherever a man "fronts" a fact.
from the chapter "Thursday" in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

Live free, child of the mist, -- and with respect to knowledge we are all children of the mist.
From the essay Walking

In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line.
As surely as the sunset in my latest November shall translate me to the ethereal world, and remind me of the ruddy morning of youth; as surely as the last strain of music which falls on my decaying ear shall make age to be forgotten, or, in short, the manifold influences of nature survive during the term of our natural life, so surely my Friend shall forever be my Friend, and reflect a ray of God to me, and time shall foster and adorn and consecrate our Friendship, no less than the ruins of temples.

I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion.

The fact which the politician faces is merely that there is less honor among thieves than was supposed, and not the fact that they are thieves.

Let us first be as simple and well as Nature ourselves, dispel the clouds which hang over our brows, and take up a little life into our pores. Do not stay to be an overseer of the poor, but endeavor to become one of the worthies of the world.

I have a great deal of company in my house; especially in the morning, when nobody calls.

In the streets and in society I am almost invariably cheap and dissipated, my life is unspeakably mean. No amount of gold or respectability would in the least redeem it,—dining with the Governor or a member of Congress!! But alone in the distant woods or fields, in unpretending sprout-lands or pastures tracked by rabbits, even in a bleak and, to most, cheerless day, like this, when a villager would be thinking of his inn, I come to myself, I once more feel myself grandly related, and that cold and solitude are friends of mine. I suppose that this value, in my case, is equivalent
to what others get by churchgoing and prayer. 
I come home to my solitary woodland walk as the homesick go home. 
I thus dispose of the superfluous and see things as they are, grand and beautiful. I have told many that I walk every day about half the daylight, but I think they do not believe it. 
I wish to get the Concord, the Massachusetts, the America, out of my head and be sane a part of every day. 
from the Journal (January 7, 1857)

A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone. 
from the chapter "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" in Walden

I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. 
from the chapter "Economy" in Walden

I have heard of a dog that barked at every stranger who approached his master's premises with clothes on, but was easily quieted by a naked thief. 
from the chapter "Economy" in Walden

A writer who does not speak out of a full experience uses torpid words, wooden or lifeless words, such words as "humanitary," which have a paralysis in their tails. 
from the Journal (July 14, 1852)

I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born. 
from the chapter "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" in Walden

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. 
from the "Conclusion" to Walden

An efficient and valuable man does what he can, whether the community pay him for it or not. The inefficient offer their inefficiency to the highest bidder, and are forever expecting to be put in office. 
from Life without Principle

The sea-shore is a sort of neutral ground, a most advantageous point from which to contemplate this world. It is even a trivial place. The waves forever rolling to the land are too far-travelled and untamable to be familiar. Creeping along the endless beach amid the sun-squall and the foam, it occurs to us that we, too, are the product of sea-slime. 
from the chapter "The Sea And The Desert" in Cape Cod
To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, 
nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live 
according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, 
magnanimity, and trust. 
from the chapter "Economy" in Walden

The physiologist says it [ripening of fruit] is "due to an increased absorption of oxygen." 
That is the scientific account of the matter, -- only a reassertion of the fact. 
But I am more interested in the rosy cheek than I am to know 
what particular diet the maiden fed on. 
from Chapter 1 of Autumnal Tints

I too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, 
but I had not made it worth anyone's while to buy them. 
Yet not the less, in my case, did I think it worth my while to weave them, 
and instead of studying how to make it worth men's while to buy my baskets, 
I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them. 
from the chapter "Economy" in Walden

Perfect sincerity and transparency make a great part of beauty, 
as in dewdrops, lakes, and diamonds. 
from the Journal (June 20, 1840)

Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, 
not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps. 
From the essay Walking

The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, 
and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. 
What demon possessed me that I behaved so well? 
from the chapter "Economy" in Walden

A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. 
It is Earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures 
the depth of his own nature, 
from the chapter "The Ponds" in Walden

In the days before his death, 
his Aunt Louisa asked him if he had made his peace with God. 
His answer was "I did not know we had ever quarrelled, Aunt." 
from the Harding and Richardson biographies

We linger in manhood to tell the dreams of our childhood, 
and they are half forgotten ere we have learned the language. 
from the chapter "Friday" 
in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers
I will send the light-colored trout and the pickerel with the longer snout, which is our large one, when I meet with them. I have set a price upon the heads of snapping turtles, though it is late in the season to get them.

To Elliot Cabot, 1 June 1847, in Correspondence

Say what you have to say, not what you ought.
Any truth is better than make-believe.

from the “Conclusion” to Walden

It is a rare qualification to be able to state a fact simply and adequately.
To digest some experience cleanly.
To say yes and no with authority--To make a square edge.
To conceive & suffer the truth to pass through us living & and intact....
Say it and have done with it. Express it without expressing ourself.
See not with the eye of science -- which is barren --
or of youthful poetry which is impotent.

from the Journal (November 1, 1851)

As in old times they who dwelt on the heath remote from towns were backward to adopt the doctrines which prevailed there, and were therefore called heathen in a bad sense, so we dwellers in the huckleberry pastures, which are our heath lands, are slow to adopt the notions of large towns and cities and may perchance be nicknamed huckleberry people.

from the Journal (December 30, 1860)

Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought

from the "Conclusion" to Walden

You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns.

from the chapter “Brute Neighbors” in Walden

I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well.
Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience.

from the chapter "Economy" in Walden

A little thought is sexton to all the world.

from Life Without Principle

A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is Earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.” –

from the chapter “The Ponds” in Walden