19th century Transcendentalism Reflective Essay

Instructions and Rubric

**Purpose:** A final assessment that shows your understanding of Transcendentalist ideas throughout the literature of the 19th century and your reaction and response to them in the American 21st Century.

Transcendentalism was the first unique genre of American literature. New ideas were explored. The Transcendentalists broke away from traditional, conservative religious beliefs that were brought over from England two centuries before. What did the Transcendentalists stand for? What do you stand for? How do you know? Is personal experience more important that rational fact? What is the difference between spirituality and religion? How do you express your inner-self? Who are you in relation to the world? What is the significance of nature and the environment? What does it mean to you to experience solitude? Why are some people obsessed with material things? What does this mean? Are you obsessed with material things? What’s important in life? What does non-conformity mean to you? Do you conform? Who are the non-conformists and conformists in your world?

**What is a reflective essay?** It’s just what it sounds like: an essay that makes a personal point...one that you take the time to *reflect* upon...! A reflective essay also makes connections, like between multiple pieces of literature. Before you write, you want to examine the questions above. You don’t need to address them all in your essay - and you can certainly address other ideas that relate to: spirituality, nature, non-conformity, anti-materialism, civil disobedience, self-reliance, and solitude. You should write an essay modeled after Thoreau’s *Walden* where you tell a story through anecdotes (Who can forget the ants? Or the beans?!?). Several of your lines in your essay need to be *figurative* and non-literal (see the rubric).

**Final Reflective essay:** Typed, double-spaced, MLA title and heading, two full typed pages minimum. You may write more if you like.

**Transcendentalism reflective essay check list**

**Ideas & Content**

a. Transcendental concepts to be discussed:
- Your philosophy of anti-materialism / simplified life discussed
- Your philosophy of non-conformity/self-reliance discussed
- Your philosophy of nature/environment discussed
- Your philosophy of spirituality/religion discussed
- Your philosophy of solitude discussed

b. Supports and examples pulled from multiple pieces of 19th century literature
   - Transcendentals: Emerson and Thoreau
   - Dark Romantics: Poe and Hawthorne
   - Romantics: Irving & so, so many poets!
   - Realists: Bierce, London, Gilman
   - Individualists: Whitman & Dickinson
   - *Huck Finn***

c. Clear connections drawn between Transcendental concepts, 19th century authors, and YOU

**Organization**

a. Ideas are divided by paragraphs according to content, not sources
b. A clear organizational pattern is present and obvious to the reader

**Word Choice & Sentence Fluency**

a. Transition words are carefully chosen for their purpose and suitability
b. Word choice is carefully considered for connotation, as well as denotation
c. Sentences vary in length, opening, and type
d. Figurative language is used at LEAST 1-2 times per paragraph

**Conventions**

a. verb tense is consistent – present tense should be used when discussing your current views and past tense when you use an anecdote
b. punctuation is chosen for both functionality and effect

**Voice**

a. A clear tone is present and appropriate to the purpose, not simply randomly occurring
b. A variety of writing strategies enhance the readability of this piece (You have told a story to a crowd of people before, right??)
c. You’re entertaining!