

Emerson Teacher Guide

Background information:

Ralph Waldo Emerson's works are a pivotal part of American literature, however many students find themselves overwhelmed by what Emerson meant and how it is relevant to their lives. This lesson uses a heavily excerpted text (from 20 pages to 3) so that students may get to the core of Emerson's meanings and calls to action for his fellow citizens. While students will still need teacher guidance to understand the illusions present, the heart of the activity – determining whether one can be as self-reliant as Emerson claims – is helping students understand What Emerson was calling for and Whether it is possible for this to occur in the twenty first century.

Lesson Guide

- 1) Discuss general information about Emerson and the transcendentalists. There are many in-depth prezis and websites that provide information and those can be used as needed, but the core of Emerson's beliefs (society is corrupt, but the individual is good) are a basic aspect students need to be aware of prior to reading.
- 2) Have students read the excerpted handout individually (unless scaffolding is needed for lower level readers) and reflect on what they think Emerson is trying to say.
- 3) Work students paragraph by paragraph and analyze what Emerson is saying and why he is saying it. Keep the focus on how these paragraphs support the main belief system of transcendentalists.
- 4) Ask students whether they feel Emerson's goal is obtainable or not: Question and discuss why they believe or disbelieve the claims.
- 5) Assign students the action project (on handout) I typically give them a week to complete it, but that can vary depending upon your students and their schedules.
- 6) Once the projects are completed, have students discuss their ranks. Is it possible for them to be completely self-reliant? Was it possible for Emerson to be so? Explain their answers in class discussion.

Emerson Self Reliance Action Project:

Emerson's Self-Reliance essay revolves around the importance of nonconformity and self-reliance. In Emerson's time, he was able to do this by removing himself from society (though the extent to which he removed himself is debatable). In this mini-project, you will log your daily experiences and discuss how much you existed relying completely on yourself or others. Obviously we cannot replicate Emerson's experience fully in the twenty-first century, but how much of what you do relies on your own ability. You will rank your self-reliance on a scale of 1-10.

(completely reliant) 10 --- 9- ---- 8 ----- 7 ----- 6 ----- 5 ----- 4 ----- 3 ----- 2 ----- 1(on my own)

Example:

I made breakfast at 10am. I ranked it a 5 because I made the breakfast but I didn't buy the food. I relied on myself to make the food something that was edible and nutritious, but I wasn't completely self-reliant as I relied on others to provide the food that I then cooked.

Part One: 13 hour activity log (15 points)

Time	Activity	Rank	Time	Activity	Rank
10am			5pm		
11am			6pm		
Noon			7pm		
1pm			8pm		
2pm			9pm		
3pm			10pm		
4pm			11pm		

Part Two: Reflection (20 points)

Calculate your average self-reliance rank (add all of your rankings together and divide by 14). How self-reliant were you? Write a half page response that discusses your ability to be fully self-reliant. Is it possible to be fully self-reliant as a student? As a 16 or 17 year old? In 2015? Why or why not? Fully explain your answers below.