



ENGL 337, Study of a Major Author:
Thoreau and His Neighbors

2:30-3:45 TR, 119 Armstrong
Fall 2023
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In this course, we'll read Henry David Thoreau in his various contexts. While he built a tiny house as a writer's retreat at Walden Pond and lived there for two years, he often walked the two miles back to Concord to visit family and friends. We'll follow him through woods and fields, where he found spiritual revelations and recorded observations that scientists today are using as baseline data in studying the effects of climate change. We'll follow him into town, where he was part of a vibrant intellectual circle that included

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, and Bronson Alcott and his daughter Louisa May, among others. (Thoreau may have been Louisa's inspiration for the character of Professor Bhaer in *Little Women*.) We'll devote most of our time to *Walden*, while also examining Thoreau's work in the light of these other writers. Along the way, we'll read selections from Thoreau's political writings such as "Civil Disobedience" (which inspired Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.) and "Slavery in Massachusetts." (Thoreau's house at Walden Pond was a station on the Underground Railroad, but he didn't write about that because he wanted to keep it secret.) We'll explore fictional images of Thoreau, such as his brief appearance in Apple TV's *Dickinson*. We'll come to understand Thoreau as a complex individual, a prescient observer of nature, a socially engaged thinker, and one of the most important American writers.

Required text

The Portable Thoreau, ed. Jeffery Cramer (Penguin ISBN 9780143106500)
Texts by members of Concord circle (PDF)

Graded Assignments

- A journal (one entry per week)
- Two close-reading essays (2 pp. each)
- One paper (8-10 pp.)
- Two oral presentations
 - One on a scholarly article (5 minutes)
 - One on a text from the Concord circle (5 minutes)

