

Thoreau Questions

From “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”

1. Thoreau’s method as a writer is often to move from the small fact to the larger truth. In the first sentence, he tells the reader that his unfinished house allowed the air to blow through. How does this simple fact become important in the discussion of “winds” in the last part of the paragraph?
2. The theme of the next paragraph is the effort to “live deliberately” in order to “live deep.” In what way did living in the woods enable Thoreau to improve the quality of his life?
3. The final paragraph assures that “we live meanly, like ants.” A) What explanation does Thoreau give for this way of life? B) Why does he place so much emphasis on simplicity?

From “Brute Neighbors”

4. In this famous instance of Thoreau’s close observation of nature, how does he give the “war” between the ants some significance? In other words, how does he make it more than simply a battle between ants?
5. At the end Thoreau observes that he “never learned which party was victorious, nor the cause of the war...” How is this statement also a comment on human wars?

From “The Pond in Winter”

6. Thoreau says he “awoke to answered questions, to Nature and daylight.” What was the question he was dreaming about and how does nature transcend all questions and doubts about existence?
7. The final paragraph focuses on the fisherman who came to Walden Pond from the town. A) In what way are the fishermen “as wise in natural lore as the citizen is in artificial”? B) What evidence proves that these “wild men” have penetrated more deeply into nature than the trained naturalist (scientist)?

From “Spring”

8. In the second paragraph, Thoreau says that spring is a “memorable crisis” because it is at once gradual and sudden. What changes in nature and the pond mark the mysterious point at which winter turns to spring? Specifically, look for images appealing to the senses.

From “Conclusion”

9. In his conclusion Thoreau again applies the lessons of his experiment to broader experiences. In the first paragraph, what general lesson about conformity is to be drawn from the path he wore between his house and the pond?
10. The example in the third paragraph of the man who “hears a different drummer” is one of the most quoted passages from *Walden*. How does this passage support Thoreau’s earlier criticism of conformity?
11. The fifth paragraph centers on the rebirth that is possible once we have opened ourselves to nature and to our true inner selves. With this in mind, what is the “moral” of the story of the beautiful bug that emerges from the old table?
12. In some respects, the final sentences of “Conclusion” sum up all of *Walden*. Thoreau reminds us that finding our “perfect summer life” is not merely a matter of waiting. According to Thoreau, in what way may any of us prepare to experience spiritual awakening?