“Solitude” by Henry David Thoreau / from *Walden* name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

THIS IS A delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes\* delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt-sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial\* to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whip-poor-will\* is borne on the rippling wind from over the 5 water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the mind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The repose\* is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit, now roam the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature's watchmen--links which connect the 10 days of animated life. [ . . . ]

There is commonly sufficient space about us. Our horizon is never quite at our elbows. The thick wood is not just at our door, nor the pond, but somewhat is always clearing, familiar and worn by us, appropriated and fenced in some way, and reclaimed from Nature. For what reason have I this vast range and circuit, some square miles of unfrequented forest, for my privacy, abandoned to me by men? My nearest neighbor is a mile distant, and no house is visible from any place but the 15 hill-tops within half a mile of my own. I have my horizon bounded by woods all to myself; a distant view of the railroad where it touches the pond on the one hand, and of the fence which skirts the woodland road on the other. But for the most part it is as solitary where I live as on the prairies. It is as much Asia or Africa as New England. I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself. [ . . . ]

There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of nature and has his senses still. There was never yet 20 such a storm but it was Aeolian music\* to a healthy and innocent ear. [ . . . ] While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me. The gentle rain which waters my beans and keeps me in the house today is not drear and melancholy, but good for me too. Though it prevents [me from working in my garden], it is of far more worth than my hoeing. If it should continue so long as to cause the seeds to rot in the ground and destroy the potatoes in the low lands, it would still be good for the grass on the uplands, and, being good for the grass, it would be good for me. 25 Sometimes, when I compare myself with other men, it seems as if I were more favored by the gods than they, beyond any deserts that I am conscious of; as if I had a warrant and surety at their hands which my fellows have not, and were especially guided and guarded. I do not flatter myself, but if it be possible they flatter me.

I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude. [Only once did I feel differently], and that was a few weeks after I came to the woods, when, for an hour, I wondered if [the company of others] was not essential to a 30 serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle 35 expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.

1. Look up “strange” (2). What does Thoreau mean when he says “strange”? Is he creating a negative or positive connotation?

2. Identify where Thoreau uses description in the opening paragraph. Why does he do so? How does he use it as grounds to prove something?

3. What’s the difference between “rippled” and “ruffled” (6)? Which is better in the context of this essay?

4. What does Thoreau mean when he says “[o]ur horizon is never quite at our elbows” (if it helps, sub “fingers” for “elbows”) (11)?

5. What is the implication of the metaphorical comparison of Thoreau’s woods to “Asia or Africa” (17)?

6. Identify and explain Thoreau’s use of personification in the final paragraph.

7. Hey! There’s “strange” again (37). What does it mean this time?

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| imbibes (1) (verb): | congenial (3): friendly | whip-poor-will (4): a type of bird. It has a nice song it sings? Man, I don’t know. Stupid nature. |
| repose (8) (noun): | Aeolian music (20): an Aeolian harp is a type of ancient Greek instrument that produces notes when wind passes through it |  |

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| TRANSCENDENTALISM | BIOGRAPHICAL STUFF |
| 1. Provide a scholarly definition of transcendentalism.  2. How does the text represent aspects of transcendentalism?  3. Support your answer for question #2 with grounds from the text. | 1. In what ways did Thoreau personally identify or participate in the transcendentalism movement?  2. What were his views of transcendentalism?  3. How do scholars see him fitting in with the movement? |