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Humanities

Ashely 1-2

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Literary Analysis Essay: TNTSJ

 Living in the woods, not trusting the country you live in, and learning from your surroundings would be worst case scenario for most people. This is how Henry David Thoreau lived when the Mexican American war was happening (1849). In the play The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Henry’s Henry spent days in jail for not playing taxes. It shows how he lived his life and why he did what he did as a transcendentalist. What would push you to live in these conditions and as he did in 1849? To understand how he lived you have to go into the play and the writing *Civil Disobedience*. Henry David Thoreau lived his life in many different ways. The two ways you can split them up into is living in his mind and living in the outside world. Then I can see what it would take to live like he did.

Henry David Thoreau lived his life in many different ways. The first way of living, was the way he did inside his mind. In The play The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail Henry is talking to Waldo about casting a vote on an issue in America about the Mexican American war. He says “Cast your while vote. Not just a strip of paper! Your whole *influence*” (84). In Henry’s mind you have to do more than just place a vote in hopes it will change something. You have to mentally except what you believe and pursue the right answer. As he said your influence can not be but on a piece of paper it lives within you. Henry made sure to follow this way of living and take action to wrong doing, but mostly inside himself. Another statement in the play shows a different way he thinks. Early in the play Henry is talking to a student’s sister out on a lake. He is explaining what transcendentalism is to her but she cannot rap her mind around such an open idea. On the boat the discussion goes:

HENRY- … Can you touch the bottom?

ELLEN - (Reaching down.) It’s too deep.

HENRY-For the length of your arm. Not for the length of your mind... (35).

Even when she cannot reach the bottom it is the ideals of a transcendentalist to see far beyond what your body can see. He is using his mind to reach the bottom of the lake and imagine what it is like. Mentally he can see anything he wants to without being there. Both of these quotes show how he is much more connected to everything with his mindset. The idea of transcendentalism changes the way he thinks and sees everyday life. The outside world that he believes and breaths in is definitely affected by the way he mentally lives.

Henry does have a curtain way he lives in the outside world because of his metal integrity. The outside world he lives in is just as strange, but is mostly justified by his internal mindset. In Henry’s writing (*Civil Disobedience)* he talks a lot about what makes you just in the world. As he says in the writing “You must live within yourself, and depend upon yourself always tucked up and ready for a start, and not have many affairs…” (5)*.* This piece of writing explains how Henry does live life. With a small amount of stuff, he lives simple ready for anything to hit him. Taking this idea of living simple and not having many affairs Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee explain his life at Walden’s pond. This is just as a runaway slave (Williams) approaches Henry and attacks him so he cannot get hurt. The play goes “WILLIAMS- How come you live like a black man? In a slave shack? HENRY- Maybe to prove that *less* is more. You see, I’m really very wealthy; I just don’t have any money, that’s all” (82). The idea of Henry living inside his mind more so comes out in this quote. He lives but prioritizes his life inside his mind, making outside life that is worse better for him. The way Henry David Thoreau lives his life in the world is highly connected to his mind. A very simplistic life with a very complicated mindset is how he goes about living.

The way Henry lives his life inside and outside is in a very different way then I and most people live today. A transcendentalist makes decisions of protecting natural and learning from your surroundings. Most of us today live very social and have modern technology which it may be really hard to live like he did. In *Civil Disobedience* by Henry he states one idea that could push me more towards the way he lived. Saying “They hesitate, and they regret, and sometimes they petition; but they do nothing in earnest and with effect.”(3). The reason this ideal would push me to living that mindset is simple because it is true. Living life only 16 years I have learned the more you back down the more it comes back and haunts you later. Hesitating and regretting that you did not do something effective will always follow you. Henry David Thoreau wrote a lot about how unjust laws need to be broken to move forward in a civilization. A person that agreed and put some of these ideas into effect was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They way that M.L.K has shown me what it would take to make this rational life change is in his writing “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”. He says “This ‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’ We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that ‘justice too long delayed is justice denied.’ ” (1). In M.L.K’s situation this was in full effect of racial tensions. I would be moved into that position of justice was not served to the wrong person or not at all. If in any way it affected me my life would change into what Henry David Thoreau’s once was.

The ways Henry lived life inside his mind and in the outside world were far from what we know today. The way I live would be have to be drastically changed to move into his way of life. Although Henry did live in these different states they were not wrong in any way to him or to me. They are completely justified by the plays and writings he has been in and created. A question for you is, what would you have to do to live in the ways that Henry did?