

Henry David Thoreau: A Brief Biography

Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817, in Concord, Massachusetts. His actual given name at birth was David Henry, not Henry David. Thoreau didn't start going by Henry David until college or soon after. However, he never sought a legal name change.

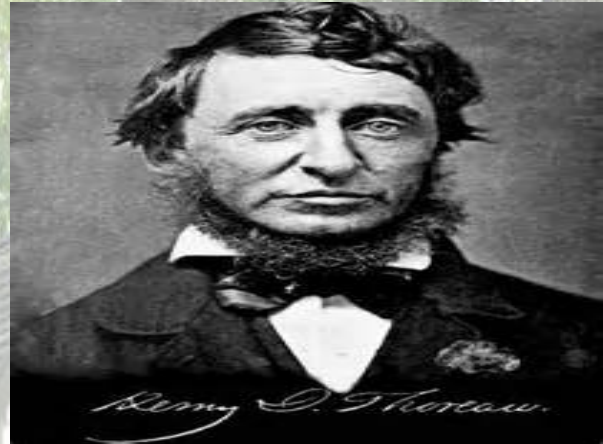
Thoreau was the third of four children. He had two older siblings named Helen and John Junior. After him was a younger sister name Sophia. Thoreau was never married and didn't have any children. However, Henry and his brother John dated the same women. John ended up marrying the woman that both men dated.

For college, Thoreau went to Harvard. He obtained both bachelors and masters degrees from the university. While at Harvard, Thoreau studied the classics. However, Thoreau refused to pay the \$5 fee Harvard had to get his two diplomas. He ended up receiving the diplomas later.

After Harvard, Thoreau returned to Concord, Massachusetts, instead of entering the fields of those with college degrees, at the time, such as law, the church, business, or medicine, because Thoreau had a lack of interest in those fields. During this time in Concord, Thoreau was introduced to new people who were writers and thinkers.

1845 through 1849 was when Thoreau delved into living the simple life. He lived his two years on Walden Pond during this stretch of years. He also got politically interested in abolition. During this time, a tax collector came wanting six years of back poll taxes from Thoreau. Thoreau refused to pay the back poll taxes and spent the night in jail. He was released the next day because his aunt paid the back taxes. Due to this experience, Thoreau also began a dislike for the Mexican War. These experiences prompted him to write *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*. Thoreau also traveled to Quebec, Maine, and Cape Code multiple times during these years to further be with nature.

Thoreau was an avid reader as well throughout his life. In his later years, he further read many subjects of nature such as botany. Thoreau's late works explored these many subjects based on his observations. He continued to travel to many places and read previous writings by early



explorers. This resulted in further writings by Thoreau. Through his years of living in and observing nature, Thoreau wrote and commented on his beliefs of living in nature. This consisted of having a happy medium between nature and civilized living.

However, his later years were also plagued with illness. From 1835 through 1862, Thoreau dealt with tuberculosis. In his last few years, Thoreau was bedridden with the illness which caused his death on May 6, 1862.

In the years after his death, Thoreau's work had social and political influence, which politically influenced John F. Kennedy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King. Thoreau's writings and political stances also had an influence on countless authors of various genres.

Thoreau had done many things during his life. These included being an author, poet, philosopher, freemason, abolitionist, naturalist, tax resister, development critic, surveyor, historian, and leading transcendentalist.

As an author, Thoreau's books, articles, essays, journals, and poetry totaled over twenty volumes which were published during his life and after his death. His writings covered nature, abolition, resting tax, and non-violent resistance. Thoreau was also political in resisting government as noted in his book *Civil Disobedience*